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Rising from the ashes – the rebuilt Jaffna Library (above); Govt. and LTTE delegations with Vidar Helgessen and Eric Solheim in Thailand for the fourth round of peace talks (below)

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"I do not agree with a word of what you say, but I'll defend to the death your right to say it."

-Voltaire

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Peace Talks - A Modest Progress

As '*Tamil Times*' enters the twenty-second year of its continuous publication, for the first time in two decades, Sri Lanka and its people have had the fortune of enjoying a year of non-fighting thanks to the cessation of hostilities between government forces and the Tamil Tigers and the ongoing peace process. Peace and normalcy may not have returned, but the absence of war and the observance of the ceasefire by the parties dedicated to continue to remain engaged in negotiations present much hope for optimism.

Though a more substantial outcome was anticipated following the successful previous three rounds of peace talks between the Government and the LTTE, it must be stated that the outcome of the just concluded fourth round in Thailand was quite limited. Contrary to expectations, the discussions did not deal with the political core issues surrounding the conflict or its human rights dimension. This may have been not due to a lack of desire on the part of the parties, but certain intervening controversial issues that cropped up in the period preceding the talks clouded the atmosphere. The split in the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress and fractious public infighting between the factions cast a doubt as to who would represent the interest of the Muslim people at the talks. During the previous rounds of talks, SLMC leader, Mr Rauf Hakeem, had represented their interests both as a member of the Government delegation and as a leader of the Muslim community. As the SLMC was embroiled in its own internal crisis, Muslim MPs belonging to the United National Party and the Peoples Alliance such as M.H. Mohamed and A.H.M. Fowzie, speaking on behalf of the Alliance of Muslim Parliamentarians for Peace, made a request to the Prime Minister to remove SLMC leader Rauff Hakeem from the negotiating team. Eventually Mr Hakeem went to Thailand as part of Government delegation, where his capacity to represent Muslim interests was, rather incautiously and unhelpfully, raised by the LTTE's chief negotiator Mr Anton Balasingham.

The second issue that dominated the media in the weeks preceding the peace talks was the curious and controversial involvement of the Norwegian Embassy in Colombo as the 'consignee' for the import of radio transmitting equipment for the LTTE. Norwegian Ambassador Jon Westborg, who has so far played a significant role in the peace process as one of the facilitators, became the eye of the storm. Accusations of Norwegian partiality to the LTTE were accompanied by angry calls for Jon Westborg's expulsion. Even President Kumaratunga weighed in with a letter to the Norwegian Prime Minister questioning the role of the embassy in the import of the equipment. Eventually, the issue was somewhat defused with the Prime Minister's intervention who said that the Norwegian Embassy had acted at the request of his Government, and that the equipment was imported pursuant to an application by the LTTE's Peace Secretariat in Kilinochchi for the purposes of advancing the peace process. If the Prime Minister's version were true, and there is no reason to doubt it, one wonders as to why the government itself did not deal with the LTTE directly and openly in this transaction without putting the Norwegians into a situation in which their impartiality became questioned. The Norwegians themselves would have been better advised not to get involved in matters that might lead to their impartiality being questioned.

The third issue was the one that became more contentious between the Government and the LTTE that almost threatened to derail the peace process - the demand of the LTTE that resettlement of internally displaced people (IDPs) within the areas in Jaffna which have been designated as High Security Zones (HYZs) in the Ceasefire Agreement. Pursuant to a decision taken by the Sub Committee on De-escalation and Normalization (SDN) attended by representatives of both parties, the Army submitted a document to the SLMM and the LTTE in which it proposed a progressive decommissioning by the LTTE of its long-range weapons if resettlement of IDPs within the HYZs. The LTTE reacted angrily to the linking of the resettlement issue with the issue of decommissioning of weapons by the LTTE and pulled out from attending the meetings of the SDN declaring it as 'defunct'. The dispute became more and more contentious as the media became dominated with statements and commentaries as to the respective merits of each party's case. And eventually it was this issue that overshadowed the entire proceedings of the fourth round of peace talks and the attendant press conferences.

In this backdrop, what is promising is that the parties are resolved to remain engaged within the peace process. They have fixing dates for future talks in the coming months and have reached though modest, significant decisions, including on the issue of resettlement of displaced people in areas within and outside HSZs. The World Bank is to be the custodian of the 'North East Reconstruction Fund'. Human rights issues are to be discussed at the next round of talks. A mechanism is to be established with the assistance of the ICRC in respect of persons 'Missing in Action' and involuntary disappearances. A Committee with named Members was appointed to address gender issues in the peace process with terms of reference to be decided at its first meeting.

The lesson to be learnt from the highly publicised recent disputes, particularly relating to the issues of resettlement within HSZs and decommissioning of weapons, is that the parties should make their efforts to iron out them within the mechanisms available within the peace process. Treating these mechanisms as defunct because of one or more disputes that crop up will only serve to exacerbate them. Public exchanges employing intemperate or accusatory language or the display of brinkmanship are best avoided. Normalisation of ordinary peoples' lives is not just confined to resettlement of displaced people. It also involves a parallel process of demilitarisation by both sides accompanied by a commitment to the non-use of violence.

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REVIVING A LONG LOST TREASURE TROVE

Jaffna Public Library: The Best in the Region

Vimukthi Fernando

Jaffna library rises from humble beginnings. Fruition of the efforts of many philanthropists, it is said that the, large storehouse of knowledge grew from a free library conducted at the house of K.M. Chellappah.

Taking his example, a few intellectuals got the idea of establishing a library and formed a committee to carry out the task. Jaffna library opened at a rented room down Hospital Road, on August 1, 1934 with 844 books and 30 periodicals. It did not take long for the library to 'grow' with the reading material as well as in numbers patronising it. January 1935 saw the library shifting to a more spacious building on Main Street, Jaffna.

In 1936, it was again shifted to a building near Town Hall and subscription and lending of books started. Soon, the demand for a permanent building and modern facilities began to rise and Sam Sabapathy, the first Mayor of Jaffna stood up to the task. Various fund raising campaigns were held and they managed to open the library on the present premises in 1953.

The Children's Section was opened in 1967 and the auditorium was added in 1971.At the time of its burning on June 1, 1981, it had acquired over 97,000 volumes including Dr. Ananda Coomaraswamy and Isaac Thambiah collections, some valuable first editions and ola leaf manuscripts with the history of Jaffna.

The best library in the region! Again. That's what it is going to be. With the latest state-of-the-art equipment - computers, printers, scanners, colour televisions, internet facilities, micro readers; telephone, air conditioning, fire alarm and fire fighting systems. Four institutions have come forward in partnership for the task. The Ford Foundation of USA, the UNESCO, Government of Sri Lanka and the Municipal Council Jaffna. The public library of Jaffna stands proud again today. Painted white, a giant building of 27,880 square feet, with two wings added to its main structure.

A phoenix from the ashes. The Jaffna library, was once a pivotal point, the symbol of intellect in the Northern capital. "The repository of Tamil culture" it was called. However, it became a 'victim' of the war that ravaged Sri Lanka for nearly two decades leaving its walls blackened with smoke, ridden with shell and bullet holes. Two decades ago, marauding gangs burned it down, turning its wealth of knowledge into ashes.

More than 97,000 books were reported lost in the process. Priceless were the ola leaf manuscripts, wherein the history of Jaffna was penned. Severe was the blow to the community in Jaffna, for the library was the backbone of this society.

And now, as peace efforts strengthen and the truce between the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE continues through its second year, there is hope and opportunity. Rebuilding of the library is only "part of the larger rebuilding of society. The citizenry of Jaffna shows a tremendous spirit. People are positive towards peace and development. Part of this hope is for their future, and the future of their children," says Dr. Sumathi Ramaswamy from the Ford Foundation. "Knowledge, especially the free access to information, is the key to rebuilding a society. It plays a vital role in restoring the dignity of people. That is the UNESCO experience," adds Prithiviraj Perera, from UNESCO. Many had been the instances where UNESCO had helped in procuring, and installing libraries in troubled situations an training their staff. "It is vital for intellectual and civic life," he says.

Back in Colombo from a visit to Jaffna, they are enthusiastic about their project. "A county's strength depends on institutions providing knowledge. They help people to come out of their dependence making them strong and self reliant," say these experts.

Their plans for the peninsula's intellectual hub include a mobile library which would take the wealth of knowledge to the remote schools. Separate sections for children and disabled persons, an auditorium and an audio visual section. However, their primary concern is whether the ground situation would allow this to happen. Discussions are under way with the government to help get connectivity, to empower people with the internet, the global information sharing system.

This will help the average citizen to learn and use the internet. The aim is to make the library the centre of knowledge for the general citizenry, which is outside the university.

Sustainability is assured through technical support programmes, training for library staff and technicians, networking with other libraries.

A small fee is proposed to be charged for library services, for maintenance purposes. A Ford Foundation grant of US $ 200,000 goes in to the project through UNESCO, its implementing agency.

More projects are to begin in the near future in the peninsula though UNESCO's cultural and communication arms. Preserving the heritage of selected ports, fortresses, kovils and temples in North an East, human rights and peace education, a peace radio station, an a media training institute are some of the future plans in the offing. ❐

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PEACE TALKS – FOURTH ROUND

'Solid progress despite dispute'

Following the conclusion of the fourth round of peace talks in Thailand, the Norweigian government said in a statement that four days of peace talks between the government and the LTTE were frank and constructive with both parties agreeing to sustain the peace process even when difficult issues arose. It said that despite disagreement on issues relating to high security zones, the parties had agreed on an urgent action plan for the resettlement of hundreds of thousands of people in the Jaffna district.

Following is the text of the statement issued by the Norwegian government:

The Government and the LTTE held the fourth session of peace talks at the Rose Garden in Thailand 6-9 January 2003.

Deliberations were conducted in a frank and constructive atmosphere, with both parties demonstrating their conviction that the peace process must be sustained even when difficult issues are addressed.

The main focus of the parties was on the need to ensure implementation of urgent humanitarian priorities. It was strongly emphasized that the significant political breakthrough made at the third session of talks in Oslo in December 2002, at which the basic principles for a political settlement were outlined, will be sustained through continued discussions on political matters. At the same time, political progress must be underpinned by tangible improvements in the daily lives of people. To this end, there is a need for more effective implementation by the parties as well as the speedy provision of funds by donor governments.

The parties recognized that the situation with regard to the High Security Zones involves major humanitarian and security concerns for both parties. Recent controversies surrounding this matter were discussed in depth. The parties did not reach agreement on the continuation of the work of the Sub-Committee on De-Escalation and Normalization (SDN).

Notwithstanding the disagreement on this particular issue, the parties emphasized the need for progress in resettling the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons. To this effect, the parties agreed on an 'Action Plan for an Accelerated Resettlement Programme for the Jaffna District'. As the clear majority of resettlement cases relate to areas outside the High Security Zones, the first phase of the Action Plan will focus on such areas.

The plan sets out four specific tasks and corresponding deadlines:

A preliminary physical assessment to be completed by 7 February 2003

The formulation of project recommendations and identification of potential implementing agencies by 14 February 2003

The identification of available resources from appropriate funds by 20 January 2003.

A plan to release premises presently used by the Security Forces to the original owners or intended purposes, to be submitted by 31 January 2003.

Members of the Sub-Committee for Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN), representing both the GOSL and the LTTE, will meet with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shortly to discuss UNHCR participation in effectuating this plan. The particular needs of the displaced Muslim population will be duly accommodated in the resettlement process.

The second phase of the Action Plan will focus on resettlement of IDPs and refugees in areas within the High Security Zones, as and when they are released by the Security Forces for resettlement. For this purpose, the GOSL will carry out a review with the assistance of an internationally recognized military expert, taking into account relevant humanitarian and security needs.

Following the strong political and financial support pledged by the international community at the Sri Lanka Support Meeting held on Oslo on 25 November 2002, the parties stressed the need for moving from planning to implementation of humanitarian and rehabilitation programmes. The rapid establishment of the North East Reconstruction Fund (NERF) will be decisive for the speedy disbursement of international assistance. The parties welcomed a decision by the Sub-Committee on Immediate Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs (SIHRN) to select the World Bank as the custodian of the NERF. Furthermore, the parties confirmed the SIHRN as the prime decision-making body for meeting immediate humanitarian and rehabilitation needs in the north and east. The GOSL in particular undertook to ensure that the respective roles of government institutions engaged in the north and east are properly clarified and co-ordinated with the SIHRN.

In line with the agreement on basic principles for a political settlement, in which a number of issues were identified for discussion, the parties will commence a process for discussion of human rights issues. Human rights will constitute an important element of a Final Declaration. As first steps in furthering human rights issues in the process, the parties agreed on the following:

A schedule on human rights issues will be worked out following discussions at the next session of peace talks. For this purpose, the assistance of the agreed human rights adviser to the parties will be sought.

An independent verification mechanism will be established for persons Missing in Action (MIA) and Involuntary disappearances, with the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

As a means to reinforce respect for the provisions, of the Ceasefire Agreement, monthly meetings will be held between the GOSL, the LTTE and the

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Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in order to discuss issues arising from the regular SLMM summary of total recorded complaints and violations of the Ceasefire Agreement. Mr. Fernando (GOSL) and Mr. Karuna (LTTE) will be responsible for organizing these meetings and will report on progress made and any outstanding problems at each session of the peace talks.

The government expressed serious concerns related to the recent incident involving transportation of prisoners through Vanni. The LTTE gave assurances that the case will be examined and that appropriate action will be taken as a matter of urgency. More generally, the parties agreed to ask the facilitator to propose procedures to ensure rapid corrective action by the parties in cases of incidents that are or can be perceived as disrupting the peace process.

Following an agreement made at the third session of talks, a committee was established to ensure the effective inclusion of gender issues in the peace process. The terms of reference for the committee will be formulated by he members at their first meeting. The committee will be facilitated by the Royal Norwegian Government, which will seek to provide a senior Norwegian resource person and necessary financial resources. The committee will consist of the following five representatives of each party.

LTTE - Ms. Sivahimi Subramaniyam, Ms. Renuga Senmugaraja, Ms. Mathimalar Balasingham, Ms. Sridevy Sinnathampi, Ms. Vasanthapireminy Samasundaram.

GOSL - Dr. Kumari Jayawardena, Dr. Deepika Udagama, Ms. Kumuduni Samuel, Ms. Faizoon Zakariya, Dr. Fazeela Riyas.

The parties agreed that a Muslims delegation will be invited to the pace talks at an appropriate time for deliberations on relevant substantive political issues.

The parties confirmed that subsequent sessions of peace talks will take place on 7 - 10 February and 18 - 21 March 2003. The parties also agreed that additional sessions will be held on 29 April - 2 May, as well as at an appropriate time in June to be determined once dates for the International Donor Conference in Japan are established. ❐

Blueprint Emerges for Future Peace Talks

Marwaan Macan-Markar

Nakhon Pathom, Thailand, January 10 - In the agreements reached during the just-concluded round of Sri Lankanpeace talks here, the negotiators laid out the route they wish to use to cross the political minefields that lie ahead.

For starters, they prefer to avoid seeking an immediate remedy for explosive issues, particularly those that could destroy the still fledgling peace process between Colombo and the Tamil Tiger rebels.

But this does not mean shying away from politically sensitive matters. Rather, the two sides appear to be willing to soldier on by seeking solutions that will, in the end, satisfy the warring parties.

This was how the negotiators overcame the first major obstacle at the just concluded talks - a sharp difference of views between a Sri Lankan military commander and the Tamil Tigers over the resettlement of Tamil civilians in lands under military occupation in Sri Lanka's north.

It arose after the military commander suggested that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), as the rebels are known, should disarm and decommission its heavy weapons in the north before Tamil civilians are permitted back to their homes.

During this fourth round of talks, which ran from Jan. 6-10, the LTTE pulled out of a special committee set up in the war-ravaged island's north to discuss the sensitive issues such as de-escalation and normalisation.

It marked the first major setback to the negotiations since the LTTE and Colombo began their peace talks at a Thai naval base in September last year. The rebels declared that this committee was redundant, since among its members was the military commander who wanted resettlement tied to the Tigers giving up their weapons. Nevertheless, this act of protest did not result in the collapse of the talks.

On the contrary, the LTTE agreed to Colombo's proposal to speed up resettlement in areas beyond the disputed territory and, further, to seek the views of an Indian military expert on striking a balance between humanitarian and security needs.

After this compromise was reached, Anton Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, said: "The peace talks are going on very well. There is no crisis."

A similar pattern emerges in the way the negotiators tiptoed around another sensitive subject - the political concerns of Sri Lanka's Muslim minority - during the talks at a resort here some 32 kilometres west of Bangkok.

The LTTE has maintained that the negotiations had no room for direct talks between the rebels and a Muslim delegation. The government, though, has included a Muslim member on its delegation.

The Muslims are Sri Lanka's second largest minority, making up seven percent of the country's 19.6 million people. The Tamils make up 18 percent of the population and the majority Sinhalese, 74 percent. The Tigers' resistance to talking to the Muslims did not prevent the fourth round of talks from ending with a statement where Muslim issues received mention for the first time.

"The particular needs of the displaced Muslim population will be duly accommodated in the resettlement process," the statement said.

It added later on that the current negotiators, who are perceived as representing the Sri Lankan government — hence the country's Sinhalese majority - and the Tamil minority, have agreed to invite a Muslim delegation in the future to discuss pressing political issues.

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The LTTE's reluctance to permit a Muslim delegation at the talks stems from a tense relationship between the rebels and the Muslim community in Sri Lanka's north and eastern province, the region where the LTTE has been waging a war to carve out the separate state of Tamil Eelam.

Currently, there are over 70,000 Muslims from Sri Lanka's north seeking to be resettled in their homes after they were driven out at gunpoint by the LTTE in 1990.

Over 64,000 people have been killed during this almost two-decade long conflict.

This approach to negotiations - not evading the sensitive issues completely, but finding a way around them or expressing willingness to take them up in the future - was not lost on officials from Norway, who are facilitating this peace process.

In particular, the government and Tiger rebels agreed to stay on course with the talks despite the troubling issues remaining unresolved.

Vidar Helgesen, Norway's deputy foreign minister said, "History is in the making, and that requires hard work, and the parties have displayed a lot of hard work in a constructive manner in this meeting."

This attitude will be tested in the forthcoming rounds of talks, now that Colombo and the LTTE have agreed to take up human rights concerns during the peace process.

The development agenda for the war-ravaged north and east, ranging from infrastructure needs such as rebuilding roads to rebuilding hospitals and schools, is also another political minefield the negotiators will have to face.

Yet, if the language emerging from this pivotal round of talks is an indicator, both warring parties appear willing to stay engaged and talk, and not shy away from difficult issues.

It is a view reflected in a plea made in the final statement from the latest talks. The negotiators wanted the Norwegians to create a mechanism to "ensure rapid corrective action by the parties in case of incidents that are or can be perceived as disrupting the peace process." (IPS) ❐

Normalization, security and gradual changes towards a new Lanka

Teitur Torkelsson, SLLM

An unrealistic normalisation programme in the name of progress and development should not be allowed to come into force at the expense of security, as this could undermine the building of permanent peace.

In order to build peace the forces on both sides must be kept stable. In Jaffna, simply dismantling High Security Zones for resettlement and handing over land for cultivation will decrease both security and combat potential of the Government Forces. The balance of forces is the basis of the Ceasefire agreement and disturbing that balance is disturbing the Ceasefire.

Representatives of the LTTE have stated that maintaining their military strength is vital if they are to be successful in their negotiations. What applies to the LTTE in this context should also apply for the Government.

"Normalisation and de-escalation are two concepts now guiding the way in the building of Peace in Sri Lanka. As SLMM defines De-escalation it is a reduction of the level of intensity of the conflict. Normalisation is the process of returning to a friendly relationship without violence. People want normalisation and security, but one must not undermine the other.

Positive Developments of the Year 2002

One year has passed since the guns fell silent in Sri Lanka. How is this year different from the years that have made up the last two decades? During the last year people have stopped waging war and begun to build peace, people have stopped creating problems and have started solving problems, and people have stopped hurting each other and started trying to understand each other and live for each other. People have stopped asking if the war will start again and started asking how society can be made better. Fear and distrust is being removed and replaced with a feeling of increased safety and confidence. During the last year, the value of life in Sri Lanka has increased. The Government of Sri Lanka, the LTTE leadership and all the people in the country have started to experience the value of peace. Democracy is developing. Schooling for the population has improved. Security has increased. Freedom has increased. The international society has clearly shown it cares about the new Sri Lanka and at the same time Sri Lanka has become a part of the international community. These are dramatic changes and the speed of the development is even still increasing. People want more freedom, better living standards, more safety and a more stable political environment. To safeguard such developments they need a modern well-trained police force they can rely on for maintaining law and order.

Extremists, criminal organizations and other threats

Although the war has ended, some of the problems are still military in nature. However, the real threat to the new Sri Lanka now comes from the activities of extremists and criminal organisations. Those are the elements which are undermining the building of peace. All people in Sri Lanka must work together with the Government and the LTTE leadership, to protect society against these elements. Human rights violations are a destabilizing factor. Child recruitment, abductions and extortions are still a part of life in the North and East, according to complaints that SLMM is receiving. This is not the reality people like to live in and individual cadres must be active in

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supporting the LTTE leadership in stopping these activities in their areas. In the same way Government servants must support the Government in improving and strengthening its institutions and eradicating corruption. Democracy must be developed in the North and East as attacks on political groups cannot be tolerated. Certain groups and individuals will continue to commit crimes and hide themselves behind the main parties that are working on solving the conflict. This is dangerous as it will be used by extremists to undermine the building of peace. The changes in the country are however clearly for the better. Never since the beginning of its monitoring has SLMM received as few complaints as during the month of November. Ceasefire violations of LTTE during November were at a historical low and for the first time, not a single case was ruled as a violation of the Government side. Among the reasons identified by SLMM is the progress in the peace talks and the increased dialogue and cooperation between the parties at all levels. Especially encouraging has been the problem solving spirit experienced in a series of important District meetings on De-escalation and Normalization chaired and facilitated by SLMM during November.

Changes of SLMM and the importance of information

SLMM has been monitoring, facilitating and advising the parties in the peace process during the last year and has on occasions bordered on exceeding its mandate. Nevertheless, voices recommending increased powers for SLMM can regularly be heard from both parties and members of the public. Undergoing changes of SLMM depend on the decisions and agreements of the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE. SLMM will do its utmost to inform the Government, the LTTE leadership and the public on what it sees, hears and believes. SLMM will strive to maintain its impartiality and credibility. There is increased need for both parties of the conflict to inform the members of their own forces as well as the general public on the developments. They must explain what they are doing and define all these new words and concepts that might sound difficult or even dangerous for some. The parties should encourage the people to be patient and accept gradual and controlled changes. The importance and responsibility of the Media is much more than in times of war. But it is not enough to accuse. Accusations must be supported by facts and arguments. The role of the media includes in depth reporting and explanations, good judgement and healthy criticism on the course of events.

High Security Zones, resettlement and security

Resettlement in High Security Zones has received increased attention in the last quarter of the year 2002. This discussion is not only based on humanitarian concerns, but also reflects territorial concerns. Normalization and De-escalation are two concepts now guiding the way in the building of Peace in Sri Lanka. As SLMM defines De-escalation it is a reduction of the level of intensity of the conflict. Normalization is the process of returning to a friendly relationship without violence. People want normalization and security, but one must not undermine the other. Representatives of the LTTE have stated that maintaining their military strength is vital if they are to be successful in their negotiations. What applies to the LTTE in this context should also apply for the Government. The paradox in the peace argument is that the priority of normalization goes before that of security, while both rest on the present military balance. In order to build peace the forces on both sides must be kept stable. In Jaffna, simply dismantling High Security Zones for resettlement and handing over land for cultivation will decrease both security and combat potential of the Government forces. The balance of forces is the basis of the Ceasefire agreement and disturbing that balance is disturbing the Ceasefire. An unrealistic normalization programme in the name of progress and development should not be allowed to come into force at the expense of security, as this could undermine the building of permanent peace. It is therefore clear that further implementation of the Ceasefire agreement is linked to the harmonizing of normalization and security. It is in this context that a modern civilian police is imperative.

Realism and the new Sri Lanka

There will always be difficulties and different views on the future. The new Sri Lanka has chosen to solve internal differences through dialogue and not confrontation. The Cease-fire agreement will continue to be the basis of the harmonizing of mutual interests. Different groups in the conflict should recognize that their individual interests not only can, but must be harmonized. In simple words, that means that all people should practices justice towards each other in their daily life. After a long period of stagnation and destructure we are now experiencing the initial phase of a country and society in transformation. Sri Lanka has entered a new era. The new Sri Lanka is no longer stuck in the vicious circle of war which has halted development for decades. These are times for changing and modernizing society. Sri Lanka has become a part of the development of the international community. This era will not end, it is not limited to a period of time, it is a birth of a new society. Do not expect great leaps of change without effort. Too rapid changes should be avoided as stability and predictability are the two most important ingredients in security. Expect gradual changes with the direct involvement of each and every one of you. For a society to change, every person of that society has to change his or her behaviour, attitudes and expectations. The time has come when there will be more to lose from using force than from protecting the gains. The time has come to protect what you have gained during the last year. Each person has to share the responsibility for change. To share the responsibility with the Government and the LTTE leadership to form the new Sri Lanka. It is my belief that when history will look at the last twenty years in Sri Lanka, the year of 2002 will be considered to have been the best.

I wish all of us a peaceful and prosperous New Year. ❐

(The writer is the spokesman for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission)

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THE PEACE PROCESS: PROGRESS SO FAR AND CHALLENGES AHEAD

Statement issued by Paul Caspersz, Kumar David, Rajan Philips, Vijaya Kumar, Marshal Fernando, Lalith Abeysinghe, Kogilavardani, Menaka Philips, Mahinda Ratnayake, Suhadini Wickremasinghe and Ranjith Wijeysinghe.

Twenty five years ago, a few of us in this group of writers and many others horrified by the riots of 1977 came together in founding the Movement for Inter-racial Justice and Equality (MIRJE). Two years later, in 1979, three of us in this group along with three others went on a fact finding visit from Kandy to Jaffna after it was placed under Emergency Rule by President Jayewardene. Our purpose was to carry out a civilian investigation of the abduction and killing of six young men by the security forces. Those killings did not "wipe out the menace of terrorism", as decreed by the then President, but they did 'let slip the dogs of war' all over the land. Twenty three years and over sixty thousand lives later, this group of writers took advantage of the ceasefire conditions and made separate trips from Kandy to Batticaloa, the Vanni and Jaffna.

On the way to Jaffna, we had to pass through two check points, not more than a mile apart, in Omanthai, north of Vavuniya. The two check points, one under the Army and the other under LTTE control, and the respective bureaucracies sharply symbolized the reality of two polities, if not two states, north and south of Omanthai. Writing for the group after the Jaffna trip, Paul Caspersz posed the question: "Is our task then not to prevent separation but to bring back into the former unity the two separated parts?" It was a spontaneous question from the heart, at the end of a journey of commitment, and firmly founded on the premise of justice and equality for all Lankans. The question also provides a positive framework to critically assess the peace process: its progress so far and the challenges ahead. Contrast this to comments by the mostly unfriendly critics of the peace process, who, while being conveniently blind to the disintegration of the island's polity over the last 20 to 50 years, portray the current peace efforts not as a process of reintegration but as the path to separation from their illusions of unity.

"When will the peace negotiations be held, and will they be successful?" were questions we asked ourselves and that we were asked during the four days we spent in Jaffna from 16 to 20 July of 2002. The answers since then have been encouraging. Three rounds of peace negotiations were held between the UNF government and the LTTE - two in Thailand and one in Norway - from September to December in 2002. The fourth round has just been concluded in Thailand. The negotiations have been successful in comparison to both the previous Sri Lankan peace efforts and contemporary experiences in other countries. After the second round, three Sub-Committees were established to address (a) Humanitarian and Rehabilitation Needs in the North and East; (b) De-escalation and Normalization; and (c) Political Matters including constitutional, legal, political and administrative issues. At the conclusion of the third round of talks in Oslo, came the momentous announcement that the Sri Lankan Government and the LTTE agreed "to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka", and that "the solution has to be acceptable to all communities." The third round also agreed on the setting up of a Sub-Committee on Women to address "gender issues in the peace process". The focus shifted, in the fourth round of talks, to the humanitarian aspects of the conflict, and the parties noted that "political progress must be underpinned by tangible improvements in the daily lives of the people". The talks also survived the somewhat overblown controversy over rehabilitation and the High Security Zones (HSZ) in Jaffna.

In support of the peace process

We do not agree with the inveterate skeptics that the peace talks are a smoke screen for the LTTE's preparations for the next offensive in its relentless march towards Eelam. On the contrary, the peace talks are subjecting the LTTE to national and international constraints and commitments as it has never experienced since its inception. The next 'Eelam War' can only be prevented by strengthening and institutionalizing these constraints; prophesying the war, on the other hand, will directly contribute to its self-fulfilment.

One of the friendly criticisms of the peace process is that the process is monopolised by the UNF government, the LTTE, and their immediate supporters. This has led to feelings of exclusion in the South and among the Muslims, and the fear of a 'totalitarian peace' becoming the lot of the Tamils in the LTTE-dominated areas in the North and East. To learn from previous experience, an exclusive UNF-LTTE agreement, however grand and comprehensive, will not cut muster without a broader consensus involving other players and the people at large. But these concerns will have to be addressed by critically supporting, consolidating and expanding the current process to make it inclusive and accountable, and not by vexatiously opposing and undermining it.

The People's Choice

Contrary to the professions by post-1983 Sri Lankan governments, and the assertions of the LTTE and other Tamil militant groups, war was never the choice of the people, Sinhalese or Tamil. The biggest story of 2002 is that ordinary, subaltern Sri Lankans in their millions - Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims, have been able to emphatically demonstrate that peace is their only choice. It is the responsibility of all Sri Lankans to ensure that our political leaders do not betray this unambiguous choice of the people.

It is worth noting that unlike the conflicts in Israel-Palestine, Northern Ireland, Kashmir etc., where neighbours fight neighbours politically and socially, the social relationship between the Sinhalese, the Tamils and the Muslims, never deteriorated to the same extent as their political relationship. Indeed, the leader of the LTTE Jaffna Branch told our group that the social relationship between the communities

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remained positively cordial even during the war. In Jaffna, we saw Sri Lankan government soldiers going about in bicycles, very different from the days when tanks and armoured cars terrorized unarmed civilians. In Kayts, we were told that the LTTE cadres sometime undertake the delivery of meal parcels to soldiers at isolated army checkpoints.

The people in the South have witnessed and experienced the effects of the war for years on end. The destruction of public property, the stealthy shadow of the suicide bomber, the arrival of body bags at Ratmalana, the village funerals of dead soldiers, and the social ubiquity of maimed war returnees - these have been the stock experiences of the Sinhalese in the South. Who in their right minds, except those who demonically profited from the war and others who unconscionably invoke the doctrine of 'just war', would wish to return to those horrible days? The Sinhalese voters have endorsed the peace efforts in election after election every time the question was put to them beginning in 1994. They have also celebrated the current ceasefire by thronging the traditional Vesak and Perahara ceremonies, by congregating hugely in Madhu in LTTE-controlled Vanni, and by their incessant pilgrimages to the Naga Vihare and the Naga Dipa in Jaffna.

Our visits to Jaffna, the Vanni and Batticaloa have shown us the even more devastating war experiences of the Tamils and Muslims in those areas. Their fervent hope is not so much for peace in full regalia as it is for the current ceasefire to continue whether or not an agreement is reached. We saw not only how these areas have become 'separate' from the rest of Sri Lanka, but also how they were 'separate' from each other. The LTTE Police Stations and Courts in the Vanni area are not the cause of this separation but its symptoms. More damaging is the destruction of the infrastructure linkages - roads, railways and electricity transmission, between the Northern and Eastern Provinces and the rest of the country.

The key sectors of Jaffna's economy - farming, fishing and commerce, are isolated and atrophied. Tens of thousands of farmers have been affected by the reckless landmining of their farmlands. About 6,000 of the 11,000 fisher households in the Peninsula, who once supplied 30% of the country's fish requirement, are now internal refugees and cut off from the sea. For over ten years, the Sri Lankan government has been banning ocean fishing by Lankan Tamil fishermen for security reasons, while doing nothing to stop Indian trawlers fishing in Sri Lankan waters. After several years electricity was restored in Jaffna in April 2002, while the first overland supply of kerosine and petrol in ten years arrived in Jaffna in July 2002. Nearly 400,000 of the (pre-1995) 900,000 people of the Jaffna Peninsula are displaced within Jaffna and on the tracts of the Vanni. The size and misery of the 'internally displaced' has shocked even international visitors who are familiar with human tragedies elsewhere in the world.

Displaced and devastated the people of Jaffna made the most eloquent statement for peace by standing neutral when the LTTE took on the Sri Lankan army to recapture Jaffna in 2000. Even now they simply want to be left alone. What is more, no Tamil individual or group has condemned the LTTE for all but turning back on its declared goal. In earlier times, such an act would have been called a betrayal and the price of betrayal varied from the simple loss of a Parliamentary seat to the ultimate price of one's life. The LTTE itself was a past master in meting out capital punishment for perceived betrayals.

War is a Continuation of Politics, but Politics is the Conclusion of the War

While peace became the experiential choice of the people, economic realities, military experiences and international developments combined to force the UNF government and the LTTE to leave the battleground for the negotiating table. The economic consequences of the 'separation' between LTTE territories and the rest of the country exposed the non-viability of a separate state and challenged the LTTE's commitment to it. This became evident from the time the LTTE began insisting on having points of free passage between its 'territory' and the rest of the country. The war has also exacerbated the differences between Jaffna, the Vanni and the Eastern Province, and there is no uniform solution to the challenges and issues facing the peoples of these areas - not only the Muslims and the Sinhalese in the Eastern Province but also the Tamils in the three areas.

Militarily, while battles were won and lost the war was proving to be unwinnable for either side. The LTTE inflicted crushing defeats on the army in the year 2000, including the capture of the Elephant Pass, but the army was able to hold on to Jaffna despite the LTTE throwing everything it had into what it thought would be the final battle against the army. Baulked of a victory in Jaffna, the LTTE hit back by attacking the Katunayake International Airport, in August 2001. The economic meltdown and the business panic that followed were the last straw to force the new UNF government to abandon the military approach and pursue the negotiation option.

On the international front, the implications of September 11 for Sri Lanka and the LTTE have been mixed. If nothing else, it finally confirmed to the LTTE the virtual impossibility of securing international recognition for a separate state in Sri Lanka. However, while declaring war on international terrorism and outlawing LTTE operations in their own countries which restricted LTTE's financing operations in the West, the Western governments came to recognize the LTTE as a necessary party to any settlement in Sri Lanka. There are a number of reasons for this apparent 'double standard'. Despite its far reaching tentacles among the Tamil diaspora, the LTTE's operations have never posed a threat to the West in the way international militant Islamic movements are perceived to threaten the West. Like in Northern Ireland, Islam is not a factor in the Sri Lankan conflict, and Sri Lanka is the one instance where religion is not an issue in the conflict. Lastly, although Sri Lanka is one of the world's long standing conflict areas, it has no potential for escalating into an international or even regional crisis, unlike the Middle East, or Kashmir.

Those who insist that the UNF government should have exploited the post-September situation to defeat the LTTE with external help, also refuse to realize that the so called war on terrorism has either been unsuccessful in resolving or simply exacerbated the conflicts

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in Afghanistan, the Middle East, Chechnya and Kashmir. New flashpoints are threatening in Indonesia, the Philippines, North Korea and even parts of Africa. Even in Northern Ireland, where September 11 contributed to the IRA's decision to decommission its arms three and a half years after the Good Friday Agreement of 1999, new political roadblocks are stalling the peace process.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe has been criticized for allegedly compromising national sovereignty by getting Norway and other governments involved in the peace process. The fact, however, is that it was President Kumaratunga who started the current foreign involvement - albeit for proscribing and talking to the LTTE at the same time, and the same critics did not spare her at that time. The real question is that if it is alright for Sri Lankan sovereignty to get Western help to make war with the LTTE, why then it is not alright to get the West to mediate peace with the LTTE and insure that the LTTE will not revert to fighting again.

The principal players

One of the main arguments against the current peace process is that it has been used to politically rehabilitate the LTTE. Given its past record and continuing, although highly reduced, infractions, the LTTE is one of the easiest of targets for verbal castigation. But in the context of the vicious violence that Sri Lankan politics had become enmeshed in over the last 20 years, there are few around with clean hands, and that includes Sri Lanka's big neighbour, the post-Nehru India. As the Catholic Bishop of Jaffna said after the LTTE press conference in April, 2001: "he (Prabaharan) did not express remorse, but neither has the government". The state and the LTTE are both blameworthy, even if not equally in 'law', but if the current peace efforts are to lead anywhere they and others have to tap on their transformative potentials. In a world struggling to resolve its political conflicts, the growing ethos is not one of insisting on 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth', but a culture of amnesty based on acceptance of responsibility.

In many respects, the current UNP-LTTE peace process is a continuation of the initiatives of the PA government. In fact, it was the PA government that brought about a paradigm shift in Sinhalese political thinking in regard to the national question. Chandrika Kumaratunga deserves all the credit for being the first Sinhalese state leader, as President or Prime Minister, to admit that the Sri Lankan state had failed in the task of genuine National unification and to articulate constitutional changes to redress that failure. This will be her historical legacy even though her ill-advised military misadventures and her inability to reach consensus across party lines in Colombo ultimately thwarted her constitutional efforts and brought down her government in the 2001 Parliamentary election. The Norwegian route to the LTTE was also opened by her, despite her failed attempt to negotiate with the LTTE in 1994/95, and despite being the target of a failed LTTE assassination attempt in 1999. She also initiated the rehabilitation program in Jaffna with the EPDP as her Tamil political ally.

According to a number of sources, the EPDP's involvement in the rehabilitation work in Jaffna, with access to state resources, was an important consideration in the LTTE's decision

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to pursue a 'counter-partnership' with the UNP. The LTTE found a willing partner in Ranil Wickremasinghe, who would seem to have chosen to bet his political career on a deal with the LTTE when he and the defeated UNP were opportunistically abandoned by all Tamil parliamentarians for the new PA government in 1994. The UNP and the LTTE got their chance to strike a peace deal when Ranil Wickremasinghe was elected Prime Minister in the 2001 December election. Whatever might have been his subjective intentions, the objective results of his peace initiative are proving to be beneficial to the country. The young members of his team have brought a new generational freshness and a conciliatory approach to an old and vexed problem which had often been complicated in the past by personal prejudices and egotistical intransigence. Their new approach appears to be resonating well with most of the people. Without the fear of war and insecurity the natural openness and conviviality of the Sri Lankan people are resurfacing.

On the negative side, President Kumaratunga has been taking a tantalizing approach to the peace process. Her formal statements support the peace process, but her habitual indiscretions and the actions of her main advisors and her brother, Anura Bandaranaike are clearly aimed at undermining the peace efforts. The LSSP and the CP have dissociated themselves from the statements and protestations of Sarath Amunugama and Lakshman Kadirgamar, and the SLFP leadership's growing closeness to the JVP despite its overt opposition to the peace process. Although, the People's Alliance might have run its course, the UNP and the LTTE should reach out to those sections of the PA - sections of the SLFP, the Left Parties, the NGOs and a large number of dedicated individuals, who are supportive of the peace efforts even though they are not included in the process.

History will repeat itself more tragically if the UNP and the LTTE do not broaden the support for the process, and at least try hard enough to secure the support of President Kumaratunga and the Sinhala constituency she currently represents. A rather disappointing feature of the peace process so far has been the government's lack of effort to reach out to the Sinhala people and keep them constantly informed of the unfolding process. The government should realize that its ultimate constituents are the country's people and not the diplomats in Colombo.

In the North and East, the LTTE not only has to appear to be changing but also has to change for real. There have been justifiable concerns raised about the LTTE's continuing harassment of its political opponents, uneconomic taxation practices, and violations of human rights including the recruitment of children as soldiers. It is absurd to argue that these violations constitute a failure of the peace process. They represent only a failure of the LTTE to fulfill its new obligations. The merit of the peace process is that for the first time there is a forum for raising these issues and to put pressure on the LTTE to stop its violations of human rights.

The LTTE's newness to the political process and the national and international limelight it is now enjoying are certainly conducive, if not compulsive, to the LTTE saying the right words at the right time and in the right place. But its words have to be matched by deeds at places where they matter, in the Northern and Eastern Provinces, among the Tamil people, whom they claim to represent, and in a manner that does not harm the welfare of the Muslim and Sinhalese living in these areas. Circumstances and the force of arms have made the LTTE the 'sole representatives' of the Tamil people at the talks. But to the extent 'internal self-determination' in political theory means consolidation of democracy based on individual rights, the LTTE should realize that ultimately 'sole representation' without free and fair elections would be inconsistent with even the elementary norms of democracy.

We would hope that the future talks will emphasize not only self-determination but also co-determination especially in regard to dealing with issues of the peoples of the Eastern Province. Muslim representation at the talks is currently provided by the Sri Lanka Muslim Congress as part of the government delegation, and there has been agreement between the LTTE and the SLMC to work together in the East in addressing the specific concerns of the local communities.

The challenges ahead

A common feature in all previous attempts at resolving the Tamil national question, from the celebrated Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact to the overdrafted Kumaratunga Constitution, has been the emphasis on reaching a grand conclusion in the form of legalistic agreements, legislative changes, or a comprehensive constitutional solution. Invariably, these end products became the targets of immediate political opposition and were either not fully implemented (e.g. the 13th Amendment) or abandoned. There was no emphasis on incremental steps, developing a normative consensus and inclusive participation, and a process that would continue notwithstanding government change. Until the 1970s, the fundamentals of the State were in place and the agreements, if successful, would have stemmed its slide into ethnic majoritarianism. At the present time, with the State disintegrated in some parts and dysfunctional for the most part, incremental reintegration and rebuilding, and inclusive participation are necessary conditions for success.

Although the four rounds of peace talks held so far have gone well, the talks appear to be taking on a globe-trotting momentum with the risk of being isolated from the issues on the ground. The people are not expecting a grand resolution of the so called 'core issues' but tangible improvements in the economic conditions of all Sri Lankans in general, and the restoration of normalcy in the war affected areas. Without evidence of change cynicism and disenchantment will grow in the South, while frustration and despair will engulf the peoples of the North and East. A compelling experience of change can come through opportunities to participate in the rebuilding and restorative activities. While it is impossible to ensure participation by everyone and in large numbers, the opportunities for participation should not be restricted to UNP and LTTE supporters and cadres.

The participation at the talks has been limited to UNP and LTTE representatives, but the Sub-Committees could be opened up to other participants to include representatives of the different ethnic communities in different areas, local political organizations and NGOs. We welcome the announcement

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of the members of the Sub-Committee on Women, and urge that the same approach be extended to the other Sub-Committees as well. This will be the first step towards a plural democracy.

The functions of the Sub-Committees should be decentralized to deal with different issues in different areas, and provide the building blocks for a federal society. A federal state presupposes a federal society; there are plenty of federal models in the world to draw from, but it is necessary to prepare the Sri Lankan terrain to receive the preferred federal structure. The Provincial Council System and the Kumaratunga Constitution were all attempts at top-down federalism. There is now an opportunity to reverse that process, without creating additional layers of bureaucracy and (unelected) political representation that duplicates efforts and wastes resources. Already, the country is paying for multiple layers of governance with little consideration being given to streamlining and co-ordinating their functions.

The issues raised at the talks and assigned to the Sub-Committees are difficult issues that require complex trade-offs and a 'work in progress' approach rather than an insistence on instant agreements. The insistence often comes from outside detractors who for whatever reason would like to demonstrate that the talks are foundering rather than suggesting constructive ways to get over manifestly difficult situations. A case in point is the issue regarding the resettlement of displaced people in the army's High Security Zones (HSZ) in Jaffna, and the decommissioning of arms by the LTTE.

Not so curiously, the first insistence was on the absolute decommissioning of arms by the LTTE, and that was how the critics greeted the Oslo announcement that the LTTE had agreed to work towards a federal solution. Then came the Sri Lankan Army's requirement that vacation of HSZ areas by the army for resettling displaced people should be linked to the LTTE's decommissioning of its heavy weapons around these areas. While there was understandable brinkmanship on the part of both the army and the LTTE, the critics resorted to self-serving interpretations and predictions that the peace process was unravelling. The Monitoring Mission clarified that it is vital to maintain the pre-ceasefire military balance till substantial progress is made and that there should be a trade-off between the withdrawal from the HSZs by the army and decommissioning by the LTTE. The fourth round of talks emphasized the humanitarian component of the crisis and the need to start resettlement outside the HSZ areas.

The LTTE's current refusal to work with the army in the Sub-Committee on De-escalation and Normalization is not a major crisis but a minor hiccup that is not unusual during a peace process. As we see it, the humanitarian aspects should take precedence while de-escalation by both parties proceed in an even manner as substantial progress is made on other issues. The LTTE's announcement that its weapons are its bargaining chips at the negotiating table is also its admission of their limitations on the battleground.

It is very unfortunate that wild and irresponsible comparisons are being made between the Sri Lankan situation and the 50-year-old international problem of the 'Return of the Palestinian Refugees' to Israel-Palestine. It is also disingenuous for the same people who criticise the LTTE for its harassment of Tamil civilians, to argue that the Sri Lankan Army should retain the High Security Zones in the Jaffna Peninsula regardless of the plight of the displaced Tamil people. There are people in refugee camps in Jaffna for more than ten years after being evacuated by the security forces. Our group visited one such camp in Chunnakam, the occupants of which are fishermen and their families from the village of Myliddy. They have been in the camp for over ten years and cannot return to their village because it falls within the HSZ close to the Palaly military base.

It is not only the army, but the LTTE also has forced the evacuation of people of Jaffna. It forced the evacuation of the Jaffna Muslims in 1990, and, five years later, forced nearly 700,000 people to leave their homes on the eve of the military's take over of Jaffna. Not more than half of those people and a few Muslims would seem to have now returned, and the plight of the displaced in the Peninsula and the Vanni area continues. During our visit to Jaffna, there were petitions and protest marches about the resettlement of the displaced people of Chavakachcheri, the last group of people to be displaced during the 2000 battle of Jaffna. But the organizers of these protests clearly indicated that they were not demanding the total evacuation of the army from the HSZ areas, but an arrangement to reduce the area of army occupation and allow the resettlement of civilians. Curiously, the connection between the HSZ and rehabilitation was not clearly dealt with in the MoU. As a foreign diplomat in Colombo surmised to members of our group, the LTTE appears to have paid less attention to civilian issues in the MoU, and it was the TULF Parliamentarians who kept raising the issue of the Army leaving the HSZ areas to enable the return of the displaced people to their homes. After one year of peace, the LTTE is also being forced to respond to civilian pressures in raising the issue of the displaced people.

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission has described 2002 as the year when "the guns fell silent". By any measure, 2002 has been a remarkable year for Sri Lanka. It marked a full year of ceasefire for the first time in nearly 20 years. It is still too early for political celebrations and an economic turnaround, but the people are enjoying their new freedom from the restrictions and uncertainties of war and the fear of being raped or suicide-bombed. The people's choice is peace. The military experiences of the SL Army and the LTTE, as well as changing domestic and international circumstances have brought about a successful ceasefire. To the extent these objective conditions are likely to continue, it will be difficult for either party to return to the fighting mode. There will of course be violations and infractions but the real danger could be a state of general lawlessness and anarchy if the unwinding of the war machines on both sides is not incrementally and methodically undertaken. The other danger is in reaching agreements rather rapidly on paper at peace talks held at far-flung locations around the world, without corresponding changes in the ground situation at home. The biggest challenge, however, is to open the peace process at different levels and locations to include all of the principal players and involve the people themselves. ❐

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Federal framework: The need for innovation

P P Devaraj

The agreement reached between the Govt. and the LTTE on a federal solution has been hailed as a major breakthrough in the negotiation process. This has paved the way for concerted and detailed discussions on power-sharing arrangements.

In an interview given to the Sunday Observer (29/12/2002) Professor G.L. Peiris says, "We have used the term federal merely to define the system we envisage as suitable. This means that we are now firmly locked into a process... towards a new national unity based on equality and harmony among the communities".

Having agreed on a federal solution there is now a need to look at various models and evolve a suitable one for Sri Lanka. The Forum of Federations based in Ontario Canada was at hand in Oslo to give their expertise. Following the Oslo agreement a delegation of the LTTE made a visit to Switzerland to study the Swiss model. No doubt there will be several more discussions and examination of models of federalism in various countries.

A distinctive system appropriate to meet the specific multi ethnic nature of Sri Lanka will have to be fashioned. LTTE chief negotiator Anton Balasingham conceded that in the given circumstances expert opinion needs to be obtained to arrive at the best system of government.

It has also been recognized that negotiation on the complex issues regarding the structure of the state and the system of government will be a long and arduous one.

According to the statement issued by the Norwegian Govt. on 5th December the Govt. and LTTE agreed to initiate discussions on substantive political issues, such as but not limited to

* Power sharing between the center and the region as well as within the center
* Geographic region.
* Human rights protection
* Political and administrative mechanism
* Public finance
* Law and order.

In his press interview Professor G.L. Peiris has referred to the Provincial Council system as an early attempt at sharing of power that needs to be taken forward. He speaks of the need for "exploring new structures that will provide for sharing power and ensure all sections of the population to feel that they have been looked after and enjoy equal status in the country".

The Provincial Council experience has demonstrated the need for a more comprehensive and clearly demarcated power-sharing arrangement. If all sections of the population are to feel that they have been looked after and enjoy equal status in the country the scope of the discussion on power sharing needs to be comprehensive and inclusive.

The LTTE has put forward the Sri Lankan Tamil position without any ambiguity. In his speech delivered on Heroes' Memorial Day Prabhakaran has this to say, "We have always been consistent in our policy with regard to our struggle for self-determination. Tamil homeland, Tamil nationality and Tamil's right to self-determination are the fundamentals underlying our political struggle. We have been insisting on these fundamentals from Thimpu to Thailand. The Tamil people want to live in dignity in their historically constituted lands without the domination of external forces".

Expanding further on this concept LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham says, "We say the Tamil people are a nation because they have certain characteristics. They have a distinct language, culture, a history and a contiguous territory where they have lived for centuries. They also have a specific economic existence, and a consciousness of national sentiments all of which gives them the right to internal self-determination regional autonomy or self-government." (Interview Sunday Observer 1st December 2002).

Muslims form about 8% of the total population of the country. But of this only about 30% are from the North East. While about half of this 30% are in Amparai District. The territorial aspect of this 15% has found considerable emphasis in the demand for separate unit while the right of the non-territorial majority has not received so much attention.

Tamils in Sri Lanka belong to two distinct categories. In the official census classification these two categories are given as Sri Lankan Tamils and Indian Tamils.

LTTE Leaders both Prabhakaran and Anton Balasingham have spoken of Sri Lankan Tamils whose origins and traditional habitat are in the North-East of Sri Lanka. The Sri Lankan Tamils apart from having a contiguous territory have also a specific economic existence and consciousness of national sentiments.

The Indian Tamils constitute 7% or a little more of the total population of the country. They are concentrated in the Central, Uva and Sabragamuwa Provinces. The largest concentration is in the Nuwara-Eliya District where they constitute more than 50% of the total population of the district. Western Province, Southern Province and North Western Province also have smaller concentration of Indian Tamils. There are also Indian Tamils in North-East.

According to 1981 census, the popu-lation of Indian Tamils in Nuwara-Eliya district was 247,371. The Muslim population in Ampara during 1981 was 116,148. In the Nuwara-Eliya AGA division alone there were about 125,000 Indian Tamils out of a total population of 175,000. These figures will be higher in 2003.

The history, geographical location, economic existence, and consciousness of national sentiment of the Indian Origin Tamils are distinct and different to these of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

When a new system of power sharing is designed, how will the interests and aspirations of the 4th largest ethnic identity group, the Indian Tamils, be accommodated in an overall solution that meets their concerns also? The designing of adequately suitable structures and power sharing arrangements

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for Indian Tamils are of critical importance. These issues cannot be left behind for solution at some future date. Professor G.L. Peiris has spoken of a whole spectrum of forms of federation operating successfully in the world today.

Swiss federation has enabled a large number of minorities to live in peaceful coexistence. The confederation cantons and the communes are the official authorities, which characterize the Swiss State.

However there are variations from canton to canton. Due to the importance of the communes as public communities forming the basis of the Swiss legal system, a right to maintain their independence has been granted to them. Some cantons have districts, which are of greater importance than communes with far-reaching judicial, political and administrative powers. Structures have thus been designed according to circumstances and needs.

In Canada Francophones are a majority in Quebec and in the other provinces they are present in varying proportions. While there are federal laws governing the rights of communities in all the provinces there are specific arrangements in different provinces that will be of relevance to us.

One of the four foundational principles of the Canadian constitution is the protection of minorities. Although the past record of Canada has not been perfect the protection of minority rights has now been made an irrefutable part of the identity of multi -ethnic Canada. This principle is of major importance to multi-ethnic states where there can be deliberate open or subtle attempts to suppress minority cultures through submergence or assimilation.

Sri Lanka has adopted Sinhala and Tamils as official language. However, as is well known, implementation of Tamils as an official language is not really taking place. Even recommendations made by the Official Languages Commission are delayed to such an extent that it virtually amounts to non-implementation. The impact of non-implementation of Tamils as an official language is most severe in many of the areas where Indian Tamils live. In several areas there are severe shortage of teachers for Tamil schools and there are several instances of Sinhala teachers teaching Tamil. There are extremely few Tamil officials at all levels of the administrative systems.

At the time of the passage of the 17th amendment to the constitution it was accepted that the three major ethnic minority communities, will have representation in various commissions (Civil Service, Police, Judiciary, Election). It is on the basic of this understanding an Indian Tamil member was included in the Constitutional Council. However contrary to the spirit of the 17th amendment no Indian Tamil was included in the names so far recommended to various commissions. Various other instances of discriminatory treatment can be given. Measures to implement protection of minorities will have to form a foundational principle of a future constitution.

Federalism as practised in Belgium has some useful lessons for Sri Lanka. Belgium has three communities based on language. These are the Flemish, Waloon and the German speaking community. The German speaking community is a small one. Belgium has three regions, namely, the Flemish, Walloon and the Capital Regions.

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The Peace Process: A Reality Check

N. Ram, Editor, Frontline

The perception of a political breakthrough in the Sri Lankan peace process is seen to be misplaced if reality testing, which addresses six hard questions, is undertaken.

There is a widespread international perception that the peace process in Sri Lanka has made significant headway over the past few months and that, in the latest Oslo round of talks (December 2-5, 2002), there has been a 'breakthrough' towards an enduring political settlement of the island's two-decade-old armed conflict. If the perception of a breakthrough were accurate, there would be reason to cheer on what would be a remarkable triumph of hope over horrendous experience. We would then need radically to revise our assessment of what used to be regarded as an intractable conflict or 'crisis', which defied a negotiated solution in the short as well as medium terms. We would also then need to recognise that the time frames and agendas indicated by the authors of the exercise - who promised 'a step at a time' and a multi-stage and long drawn out talking process - have been overtaken by events and got dramatically telescoped.

Is the perception of such a breakthrough accurate?

A recent visit to Sri Lanka, a close reading of the relevant texts and developments, and some critical reflection enabled me to attempt some reality testing of the perception. In psychology and psychoanalysis, reality testing is the technique of objective evaluation of an emotion or thought against real life, as a faculty present in normal individuals but defective in some psychotics. Here the reality check is against the perception that, with a breakthrough achieved in the latest round of talks in Oslo (as evidenced by an official statement made by the Norwegian government on December 5, 2002), the gulf separating the two parties to a horrendous conflict has been bridged in a manner and at a speed nobody could have anticipated. Asking the relevant hard questions opens the door to the exercise.

The core of the Norwegian government's statement was the formulation that "responding to a proposal by the leadership of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the parties agreed to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka." On the face of it, this was a statement of intent and endeavour, vague in its contours and not amounting to any kind of commitment.

Nevertheless, superficial media coverage could plausibly report a breakthrough since the terms "the principle of internal self-determination," "federal structure," and "within a united Sri Lanka" were strung together in one sentence and there was no explicit reference to the LTTE's secessionist goal of "Tamil Eelam." International media reports and G.L. Peiris, a senior Minister and the Sri Lankan government's chief negotiator, went so far as to claim that the LTTE had abandoned the goal of Eelam.

The Norwegian government's statement also highlighted recognition by the parties that "progress on political issues must be supported by the continued consolidation of the Ceasefire Agreement" and outlined some new concrete measures to "facilitate further de-escalation and to improve normalcy." Peiris declared, at the press conference at the end of the Oslo talks, that the peace process was "irreversible," adding "it is a commitment to peace. There is not going to be war." Anton S. Balasingham, the LTTE's chief negotiator, contributed his bit to the euphoria: "I totally agree with what Professor Peiris said."

Let us review, on a strictly factual basis, the major developments relevant to the perception of a breakthrough.

I. Non-fighting as 'Negative' Peace

The basis for all the hopeful readings is the prevailing reality of peace or non-fighting in Sri Lanka. This has been in place for a whole year now. Some analysts have characterised the situation as 'negative peace'.

It was on December 24, 2001 that the LTTE unilaterally announced a ceasefire. The background to this was the military standoff in which the combatants found themselves in the North-East. The LTTE was obviously responding to the reality of a newly elected United National Front (UNF) government headed by Ranil Wickremaesinghe. The leader of the United National Party (UNP) had, at various points prior to his election, declared himself

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Article I of the Belgian constitution says, "Belgium is a Federal state made up of communities and regions." The names of the communities and regions are given in the constitution. From this basic position follows power-sharing arrangements.

India with its complex multi-ethnic configuration has also in addition to the states other power-sharing arrangements to suit special needs.

Power sharing arrangements developed in several other federal systems can also provide useful examples. Power sharing is possible only if there is an electoral system that provides representation to the communities reasonably in proportion with population proportions. The Indian electoral system has made provisions for representation of all sections of the population in a reasonable manner. If new electoral system is going to be developed the Indian experience should be studied and adopted to meet our needs.

Power sharing must include the four major communities territorial or non-territorial and ensure security and equality of status to all persons. Even while recognizing that in the long and arduous process of evolving new power-sharing structures the statement made by the head of the Govt. negotiating team that negotiators will be getting into grips with the nitty gritty of the final settlement issues has to be noted. In due course discussions will have to be expanded to make them more inclusive. ❐

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to be in favour of peace talks "without preconditions," and even an interim administration headed by the LTTE. Soon, as the new Prime Minister noted in Parliament, there were "two cessations of hostility operating in parallel." Norwegian facilitation, initiated in 1998 by President Chandrika Kumaratunga and her People's Alliance (P.A.) government, paved the way for a negotiated Memorandum of Understanding, signed by the two parties to the conflict on February 22, 2002. This was the third ceasefire agreement the LTTE had signed since the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement came unstuck, in 1989-90.

While some of the terms of the 2002 ceasefire have been criticised by the Sinhala Opposition parties, which accused the UNF government of making unprincipled and dangerous concessions to the LTTE, there can be little doubt that the non-fighting is popular among all constituencies in Sri Lanka - in equal measure, it seems, among the Sinhala, Tamil and Muslim people. According to figures cited in Parliament by Prime Minister Wickremasinghe, the war between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan state has taken an estimated 60,000 lives and directly cost the island 500 billion Sri Lankan rupees. Although Sinhala chauvinist elements, and notably the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), advocate a military offensive to eliminate the LTTE in a fight to the finish, nobody seriously believes that there can be a military solution to the 'ethnic conflict'.

There have been reports and intimations of growing disaffection among sections of the Sinhala people. This disaffection centres on socio-economic issues and also on anxieties over where the Wickremasinghe government's entente with the LTTE is taking the country. Despite its general support to the peace process, political India's disquiet over the concessions, privileges and space extended to the LTTE by the UNF government is manifest. This disquiet is heightened by the peculiar situation in which India finds itself vis-a-vis the Sri Lankan peace process. Bilateral relations are in excellent shape, the top leaders of the two countries have been in close touch, and the $100-million line of credit India has extended to its small southern neighbour has sent out a strong positive signal. Nevertheless, given the LTTE supremo's undisputed involvement in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination, India's ban on the organisation, and strong public feelings against the LTTE, there is no way India can participate actively either as a facilitator of the peace process, or in donor conferences. India played no role whatever in the November 2002 donor conference in Oslo and it is highly unlikely that it will be any different in mid-2003, when Tokyo will host a second major conference. India's disquiet finds its socio-political reflection across all constituencies in Sri Lanka. There have also been a number of incidents in both the North and the East turning on the LTTE's conduct in a time of non-fighting. Its power play, quest for hegemony, extremist intolerance, attempts to expand its parallel quasi-state structures, militarism and determination to keep its fighting machine replenished and primed up do not, in the least, suggest it has made a break with Pol Potism and extremism. There have been credible reports of the LTTE arranging arms shipments for itself. For all the assurances V. Prabakaran, the LTTE supremo, held out to the Muslims and Sinhalese of the North-East, the East continues to be a volatile region. While the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF) and other moderate Sri Lankan Tamil parties have fallen in line, at least for now, with the hegemon's programme and dictates, Tigerism continues with its rough-neck ways against smaller anti-LTTE political forces such as Douglas Devananda's Eelam People's Democratic Party (EPDP).

The LTTE has also put pressure on the ground situation in the Jaffna Peninsula by orchestrating the demand that the "humanitarian" issue of internally displaced persons be addressed urgently through dismantling the 'high security zones' and making them available for re-settlement and cultivation. This has led to some speculation in Colombo that the talks could run into trouble and even break down on this issue. The situation has also invited a forthright clarification from Trond Furuhovde, head of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM), that there could be no one-sided reduction in the balance of forces and that a normalisation programme "in the name of progress and development" and at the expense of security was "unrealistic" and "could undermine the building of permanent peace."

But sheer relief at the absence of conventional and guerilla warfare, bomb explosions, suicide attacks, and overt acts of terrorism is strong and palpable and keeps the negative factors in check. Economically, politically, socially, the peace dividend for Sri Lanka is in the nature of an axiom that requires no proof. Internationally too, there is great relief at this spell of non-fighting in Sri Lanka.

It is this peace platform that has provided Prime Minister Wickremesinghe and his government with momentum, opportunities, and an attractive national and international image, at least for now. A corollary is that if the hopes for peace are dashed by the LTTE reneging on the ceasefire agreement - after developing a seeming justification or inventing a plausible excuse - the UNF government's political and electoral stock can plummet in no time. In this sense, the fate of the Wickremasinghe government hangs precariously on how the LTTE chooses to behave in the near and conceivable future.

II. Does the LTTE have a real choice?

This naturally leads to the second key question: how free or constrained is the LTTE in matters of war and peace? There are those who argue that, given the post-September 11, 2001 international situation and the political climate against terrorism, the LTTE has no real choice and that recidivism, a return to the path of war and overt terrorism, can virtually be ruled out. Even before September 11, several countries, notably India, the United States and the United Kingdom, either imposed a ban on the LTTE or designated it as a terrorist organisation under special laws. The proponents of the view that the Tigers will not return to war because the international climate forbids it include some leaders of the 'moderate' Sri Lankan Tamil parties, UNF partisans, peace campaigners, and a fluctuating band of international pundits.

An additional constraining factor is believed to be the hardened climate for fund-raising by the LTTE in developed countries. It is suggested that the prospect of these external sources of major fund-raising completely drying up will act as an effective deterrent to Pol Potist

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recidivism. These restraining factors are real and should not be brushed aside in an exercise of reality testing. In other words, the relevant question is not whether these restraining factors are at work. It is whether their weight is such as to counteract the LTTE's proven extremist and Pol Potist character, its commitment to Tamil Eelam through armed struggle and terrorism, and the formidable military and political capabilities it has built up over the years.

An alternative answer to the question of how free or constrained the LTTE is in matters of war and peace is suggested by the Sri Lankan Tamil journalist and political analyst, D. B. S. Jeyaraj: "Perplexing as it seems, other indicators suggest that the LTTE has not revised its fundamental objectives but only engaged in a tactical shift as a political ploy... If so, the LTTE game plan is clear. The proclaimed intention of seeking a federal solution is only for international consumption. It seems the Tigers want the negotiating process to fail at some stage without any blame attaching to them. The peace process should not arrive at a logical conclusion; instead, it should collapse without a satisfactory solution being structured. If and when that happens, the LTTE could opt out and exercise its 'right of external self-determination' and pursue a 'secessionist war' again. Pinpointing the failure of Colombo to arrive at a federal solution, the Tigers would assert that the Sinhala people were incapable of redressing and accommodating Tamil grievances and aspirations within a united Sri Lanka' ("A tactical shift", Frontline, January 3, 2003).

Such a reading of the evolving situation is backed by the LTTE's horrifying track record. The question that must be kept open at this time of non-fighting is whether the new international situation, including the signal sent out of the recent Oslo donors' conference that the Tigers must renounce separatism as well as the use of violence and terror if external funds are to flow into the North-East for the work of rehabilitation and rebuilding, can exert the kind of overwhelming pressure that will compel the LTTE to make a decisive break with this track record.

III. Is a Southern consensus possible?

It is axiomatic that any peace process, in order to be successful, must win broad agreement from the two main 'Sinhala' political parties - the UNP and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) - and ideally from all the parties that have a popular base in the South.

The LTTE's extremist intransigence aside, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement ran into political heavy weather because the SLFP led by Srimavo Bandaranaike opposed it and the JVP waged war on it. President R. Premadasa's 1989-1990 entente with the LTTE did not even bother to try and win Opposition support for whatever political solution he had in mind. Between 1995 and 2001, President Kumaratunga - who decisively broke with the tradition of Sinhala political chauvinism and made bold, far-going devolution proposals - made a serious attempt to engage the UNP in the quest for a constitutional settlement. But the SLFP and the P.A. encountered non-cooperation and obstruction from the UNP and its leader, Ranil Wickremasinghe, and found themselves opportunistically making common cause with the JVP.

The present political situation, involving 'cohabitation' between Wickremasinghe's UNF government backed by a parliamentary majority and the executive presidency of the P.A. leader, Chandrika Kumaratunga, presents complications as well as opportunities. Real political power seemed to pass into the hands of the newly elected government. For several tense months, there was talk of "impeaching" the President and even an ill-advised legislative attempt to checkmate the President by bringing in the "19th Amendment to the Constitution." But all this changed with Sri Lanka's Supreme Court pronouncing a landmark judgment in October 2002. All seven Supreme Court judges upheld the position that "the executive power of the People is inalienable and shall be exercised by the President"; that the power to dissolve Parliament (not earlier than a year after the general election, unless Parliament by resolution requests the President to do so) is "a component of the executive power of the People, attributed to the President, to be exercised in trust for the People" and therefore cannot be alienated; and that any change in this feature requires a constitutional amendment to be adopted by a two-thirds majority in Parliament and also approved by a simple majority in a referendum.

The apex court's judgment tilted the balance of power back towards the President. Although she has publicly stated that she has no intention of dissolving Parliament, she clearly retains the executive power to do so "in the interest of the people and the country." She also retains the power to dismiss the government for the same reason. It is not inconceivable that this will happen if something goes terribly wrong with the peace process.

Some commentators have seen the 'breakthrough' formulation agreed upon in Oslo chiefly as a response to the expiry of the one-year constitutional restraint on the President's executive power to dissolve Parliament. But whatever the motivations behind that formulation, it is clear that the UNF government's attitude towards the chief Opposition party and President has changed noticeably. Through regular meetings between a Minister assigned for the job and Lakshman Kadirgamar, former Foreign Minister and currently Senior Adviser to the President on Foreign Affairs, the President is kept informed of the progress and complications of the peace process. Constitutionally speaking, the President of Sri Lanka has vast executive powers, especially in relation to questions of war and peace. Bowing to the 2001 popular mandate, Kumaratunga has thus far wisely exercised executive restraint. Her active cooperation and support is imperative if the peace process is to make further headway.

Some weeks ago, Peiris ruled out in Parliament any possibility of Opposition participation in decision-making relating to the peace process. But the Oslo statement promises that the Government of Sri Lanka "will, in order to arrive at the broadest possible consensus, establish an appropriate mechanism for consultation with all sections of opinion as part of the ongoing peace process." The statement also records the acknowledgement by the parties that "the solution has to be acceptable to all communities."

In a press release dated December 13, 2002, the SLFP has welcomed this attitudinal change and remarked that "wisdom has finally dawned on the two negotiating parties." More materially, the main Opposition party has taken a favourable stand on the concept of find-

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ing a political solution along federal lines (without mentioning the word 'federalism'). "We commend for the consideration of the Parliament and people of Sri Lanka," the SLFP statement says, "the concept of devolution of power to the regions presented by President Kumaratunga to the people of Sri Lanka in the draft Constitutional proposals of October 1997 and August 2000. These proposals set out clear solutions, acceptable to all communities, for the resolution of the core issues of the ethnic question."

This signals a new opportunity to work out a Sinhala political consensus on the systemic change needed to accommodate the just demands and aspirations of the Tamil-speaking people. If agreement can be reached between the main Sinhala political parties on the nature and unit of the federal structure (by whatever name called) pertaining to the North-East, that would be a genuine breakthrough. It is another question whether such a structure will be acceptable to the LTTE.

IV. What about an interim administration?

The idea of an interim administration for the North-East, to take charge until a final political settlement was reached, first came on to the agenda with the implementation of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of July 1987 (even though the text of the Agreement did not mention or provide for an interim administration). The LTTE first agreed to, and then went back on, an extremely liberal proposal made by India and accepted by the government of President J.R. Jayewardene, with consequences that were fatal to the attempted political solution.

The widespread impression about the approach of the Wickremasinghe government to the ethnic conflict was that it was in no hurry to find a final political solution and that it would be satisfied with ad hoc 'practical' arrangements with the LTTE for the North-East so long as non-fighting prevailed. The apprehension was expressed in Sri Lanka and India that the UNF government was going to 'hand over' the North-East to the LTTE. The instrumentality of this 'handing over' would be an interim administration dominated by the LTTE, with token representation for Muslims and perhaps some other sections. In his April 10, 2002 press conference at a jungle location in the Wanni, Prabakaran revealed that the focus of the forthcoming talks in Thailand would be the formation of an interim administration in the North-East.

The project ran into political heavy weather, in Sri Lanka, India and internationally. Democratic, human rights and security concerns were raised and, despite the many concessions on the ground made to the LTTE, the UNF government could not put in place the interim administration that Prabakaran wanted. Eventually, the same Supreme Court judgment that restored the balance of power between the President and the government with a parliamentary majority ruled out, in principle and by implication, an interim administration for the North-East. The project would not pass muster with President Kumaratunga, whose executive powers could not be taken away without a constitutional amendment requiring a two-thirds majority in Parliament and approval in a referendum.

Consequently, a decision was made by the UNF government and the LTTE to bypass the whole concept of an interim administration and take the empowered committee route. In early November, at the end of the second round of talks in Nakorn Pathom in Thailand, it was announced that the two sides had taken "significant steps" touching on three key areas - civilian rehabilitation, military concerns, and political matters - and that three committees had been constituted to deal with these areas.

The committees, comprising preponderantly LTTE and government representatives, would report to the negotiators. The legal and constitutional status of the committees was left deliberately ambiguous.

It remains to be seen whether, in the event of the peace process progressing, LTTE pressure for some kind of interim administrative and political control will intensify, and whether the committees or practical arrangements made by them will approximate an interim administration.

V. What will happen to the parallel state structure?

The SLFP in its press release of December 13, 2002 asks another kind of hard question: "Does the UNF government know where it is going? Does it know the destination? And when we reach the destination what will we find - a so-called federal state with a standing Army, a standing Navy, a permanent administration, an independent judicial system, a tax structure, a banking system - what would this mean other than a separate State by a friendlier name?"

Despite the polemical tone, these questions about where UNF government policies - supervening on existing realities in the North-East - are taking Sri Lanka are astute and go deep into the heart of the challenge. The issue of decommissioning of arms, not to mention disarming of the LTTE fighters, is bound to come up soon enough if the peace process is to make any sense. So will democratic and human rights issues, including the issue of children snatched from their families to be trained as fighters and the condition of women in LTTE-controlled areas. The existence of a quasi-state structure, armed to the teeth and boasting its own institutions of governance, notably an efficient tax-collection machinery, a "Chief Justice of Tamil Eelam" and kangaroo courts dispensing speedy justice, will be a major roadblock as the peace process progresses. Will the LTTE agree to dismantle, even in stages, this parallel state structure in the region of its military control?

VI. The framework for a final settlement

The announcement from Oslo, at the end of the third round of talks, that the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE had "decided to explore a solution founded on the principle of internal self-determination in areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, based on a federal structure within a united Sri Lanka" came as a major political surprise. It seemed that the political agenda had been brought forward so that the fourth and fifth round of talks in Thailand, scheduled for January and February 2003 respectively, could engage with the three major areas identified - consolidation of the ceasefire, humanitarian and rehabilitation action, and political matters - simultaneously.

Does this mean that something dramatic - a final political settlement ac-

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ceptable to the LTTE, which the UNF government will present in Parliament as radical new constitutional proposals on federal lines - is round the corner?

When the hard questions are asked, it becomes clear that neither the key concepts nor the contours of a political settlement have been defined by the negotiators. A huge gulf separates the two sides when it comes to basic concepts, ground realities, and practice.

The key words in the announcement of a 'breakthrough' in Oslo are the following: (a) the principle of internal self-determination, (b) a federal structure, (c) areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples, and (d) a united Sri Lanka. It must be noted that (a) figures for the first time in an official statement accepted by the Sri Lankan government, (b) figures for the first time in an official statement accepted by the LTTE, (c) is a formulation lifted from the text of the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement, and (d) is clearly an imposition on the LTTE by the weight of international public opinion.

But how do these key words, expressing key concepts, perform together? What, for example, is the relation between the principle of internal self-determination and a federal structure? Are areas of historical habitation of the Tamil-speaking peoples a proxy for the "homeland" that the LTTE has always claimed as the historically determined birthright of the Sri Lankan Tamils? Can the principle of internal self-determination be exercised within a united Sri Lanka?

In order to answer these questions, we have plenty of guidance, theoretical as well as practical, from the LTTE. First, there are the first three of the four "Thimpu principles," put forward by the LTTE and the other Sri Lankan Tamil militant organisations in July and August 1985. These are recognition of the Sri Lankan Tamils as a distinct nationality; recognition of the traditional homeland (the North and East of the island) and a guarantee of its territorial integrity; and recognition of the right of self-determination of the Tamil nation. Then there is Prabakaran's notorious instruction, issued in his 1989 'Heroes Day' address, to his cadres to gun him down if he ever committed 'treachery' to the 'ideal' of Tamil Eelam. At the April 10, 2002 press conference in the Wanni, the LTTE supremo was asked by an Indian journalist whether this deadly instruction remained and the answer was in a light-hearted affirmative.In his November 2002 "Heroes Day" address, Prabakaran set the terms for what was to follow in Oslo. Asserting that the LTTE stood "firm in the attachment to the right to self-determination," he explained that "the Tamil homeland, the Tamil nation, the rights of the Tamils to self-determination" were "the fundamentals of our objectives'' and that the LTTE had been "insisting on these issues from Thimpu to Thailand."

He stated that "as a distinct people the Tamils are entitled to the right to self-determination," adding that this right had "two aspects - internal and external." Internal self-determination "entitled a people to self-rule." The Tamil people wanted to "live in freedom and dignity in their own lands, in their historically constituted traditional lands, without the domination of external forces." They wanted to "protect their national identity, pursuing the development of their language, culture and economy" and to "live in their homeland under a system of self-rule."

Characterising this as "the political aspiration of our people," he asserted that this demand constituted "the essential meaning of internal self-determination." Then came the key formulation that set the stage for the Oslo 'breakthrough': "We are prepared to consider favourably a political framework that offers substantial regional autonomy and self-government in our homeland on the basis of our right to internal self-determination." What was missing, of course, in the Oslo announcement was any reference to the threat Prabakaran held out in his 2002 'Heroes Day' speech: "But if our people's right to self-determination is denied and our demand for regional self-rule is rejected, we have no alternative other than to secede and form an independent state."

Does all this sound like giving up the secessionist goal of Eelam (as Peiris misleadingly claimed in Colombo) and settling for a federal solution within a united Sri Lanka - even assuming that the best elements of the Bandaranaike-Chelvanayakam Pact of 1957, the Indo-Sri Lanka Agreement of 1987, and the Kumaratunga proposals of 1995-2001 can be creatively combined and improved upon by, let's say, 50 per cent through an astonishing Sinhala political consensus?

As the scholar, Professor V. Suryanarayan, suggested in an analysis published nearly four years ago, the LTTE's conceptual approach to a federal structure has been extremely confederal in content. He cited as evidence certain constitutional proposals prepared by a London-based firm of solicitors in the 1990s and handed over informally to President Kumaratunga. These proposals envisaged the creation of a Union "which would be in the form of a confederal structure, consisting of two states each being internally autonomous." Each state would have its own internal constitution, which would determine the size and structure of the legislature. A Central Council comprising "an equal number of representatives from each state" would be empowered to look after foreign affairs, defence, security, monetary policy, common currency, and inter-state relations ("Talking to the Tigers", Frontline, January 29, 1999). At other times, the LTTE's ideological supporters abroad have held out other 'models' such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and even the European Union.

The details of the confederal idea may have changed, but the "principle of internal self-determination" and "self-rule" can be manipulated to demand something way out, way beyond what the Sri Lankan state can offer at its enlightened best. Add to this Jeyaraj's interpretation that the LTTE "has not revised its fundamental objectives but is only engaged in a tactical shift as a political ploy" and you have a possible disaster in the making.

It is the task of all reasonable people, people of goodwill, to work to ensure - against the heavy odds - that the disaster does not take place and that Sri Lanka is not pushed back into a no-win war. **(Courtesy the Frontline)**

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Sri Lanka's young forced to fill ranks of endless rebellion

Amy Waldman, New York Times

KINNAIYADI, Sri Lanka, Dec. 29 - The floods ruined this season's paddy harvest in this village of sandy earth and slanting palms.

The harvest of its youth went ahead.

Ten days ago, at least 18, and possibly 60 or more, young people, according to different villagers' estimates, were taken off to join the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, one of the world's most ruthless and effective secessionist movements. Many of them were boys and girls, some as young as 12.

Some were taken by force, yanked from houses or scooped up along the roadside like found treasure. Others went "voluntarily," to spare their parents after Tiger cadres repeatedly threatened them if they did not supply the movement with a child. They were loaded into tractor-trailers and taken away.

For 20 years, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam have fought for a separate state for the minority Tamils of Sri Lanka, the island nation off India's southern tip. The Tamils, many of whom are Hindu, are concentrated in the northern and eastern parts of the country. They say their cause has been motivated by discrimination against them by the Sinhalese, many of whom are Buddhist, who make up three quarters of the country's population of 18 million.

Much of the rebels' battle has been fought on the backs, and bodies, of child soldiers, according to human rights organizations, including the United Nations.

Today, however, the Tigers have paused in their armed struggle and put aside the quest for their own state. They are in peace talks with the Sri Lankan government. They are trying to obtain regional autonomy for the Tamil people and to transform themselves into a legitimate political organization.

They insist that they no longer have, or accept, children in their ranks. In recent months, they have undertaken the highly publicized releases of 165 children.

In an interview in Kilinochchi, the Tigers' administrative capital, the movement's political leader, S. Thamilchelvam, said: "We want to discount the disinformation campaign of previous governments. There was no conscription. There were no child soldiers."

But in whispered interviews here, villagers - afraid for their lives if their identities were revealed - told of a relentless recruiting campaign, in which the only way to save children was to send them away. One woman who had two nieces and one nephew taken told how parents, angry that they were losing their own child, had steered cadres toward their neighbors' children as well.

A police intelligence official confirmed that children had been taken; he estimated the number at 30 or 35. One villager interviewed put the number at 60 over three days. [A representative of a human rights organization, who subsequently visited the village, was told that 100 young people, mostly under 18, were taken.]

Complaints filed with international aid groups, as well as interviews with Tamils and community leaders in the Tiger-controlled north and east, also indicate that child enlistment and abduction, while down from past levels, continue.

There was a time when young people, including some children, joined on their own. The cause seemed just, and for a poor child, the movement offered meals and security.

While some children still join voluntarily, swayed by recruiting meetings at which Tigers show propaganda films of battle victories, villagers say the appetite for war here is gone. The Tigers alone have lost 17,600 cadres in battle, and the country a total of more than 64,000 lives. So to bolster their ranks, the Tigers appear to be continuing to use coercion, both of those under and over 18.

Whether classified as recruitment or abduction, taking children into the movement is a violation of a cease-fire agreement signed last February, which bars, in accordance with international law, hostile acts against civilians. It is also a violation of the Tigers' own public pledges.

The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, a team of Scandinavians invited by both sides to monitor the cease-fire, has certified 281 cases of child recruitment from February through October, with more than 400 cases still being investigated; in November, there were 24.

"We also clearly realize our complaints are the tip of the iceberg," said the group's spokesman, Teitur Torkelsson. "They're not even half." In the north, international aid groups have about 50 open cases of children who have been taken since the cease-fire was signed. There have also been reports that homes the Tigers maintain for children orphaned by war have been used as recruiting grounds for the rebels.

But most of the complaints come from the Batticaloa district in Eastern Province, where this village is.

In fact, the conscription in Kinnaiyadi appears to be only the latest wave of forced recruitment, often of children, in the Batticaloa area. Here, Tamils said, the Tigers' policy remains as it has long been: every family with three or more children must give one.

"They have thousands, and they're still taking them," said the Rev. Harry Miller, an American Jesuit priest who has lived in the town of Batticaloa for more than a half century. In July, he said, the Tigers took eight children from outside a Hindu temple feast on the edge of Batticaloa. "We haven't gotten any back," he said.

Of the problems in the east, Mr. Thamilchelvam said they were "instances" that had been brought to the notice of the high command, and the political hierarchy had been ordered to make sure they were not repeated. But he said the demographics of the area - there are large Muslim and Sinhalese populations as well - meant that Tamil

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youths often sought protection by joining the guerrillas.

This village is technically under government control, with an army camp just feet from its edge. But it has largely been forgotten by the government. The school ends at fifth grade and often is closed by flooding; the only nearby hospital, serving a constellation of villages and towns, can see only 50 patients a day.

Instead, it is the Tigers who hold sway here, which is why villagers have been afraid to even make an official complaint to the police. Terror chokes the shady byways. Residents, as in much of Batticaloa, say they do not open their mouths except to eat. To speak, even anonymously, they said, could mean putting their lives on the line. No one knows who is with the Tigers, but anyone might be.

If the past is any guide, those taken will be taken to Tiger training camps, given new names and told their past is a closed chapter. Some parents may never see their children again.

One 64-year-old woman near Kinnaiyadi, who spoke on condition of anonymity out of fear, told how last February, Tigers tried to extort money from her son under threat of death. To save him, his own son, 19, agreed to join the movement. He has not been seen since.

Others catch glimpses, often in brief and tearful reunions, of their children at the Tigers' annual Heroes' Day celebrations. Some young recruits escape, although the Tigers sometimes take a relative hostage until the escapee returns.

A few are released, as was the case in an incident involving five young men from the town of Batticaloa between the ages of 18 and 22 who were taken on Dec. 17. One of them, who spoke along with his mother - both of them too fearful to be identified - said he and his friends had gone to a Tiger office with some cadres because they thought they would be able to watch films. Instead, they were put in a van, taken two hours away and told that now that they were 18, it was their duty to join the movement and either fight for a separate state or help run a peacetime administration.

Their families, meanwhile, had found their sons' bicycles outside a Tiger office. The Tigers said the young men had willingly joined the movement, and told the parents to take home their bikes and jewelry.

Skeptical, tenacious mothers demanded that their sons be asked in front of them if they had joined voluntarily, and they protested to international organizations. The young men were quietly released two days after they had been taken.

Mr. Thamilchelvam, who is third in the Tigers' hierarchy, repeatedly insisted there had been no forced conscription. Civilians, "especially young people," had voluntarily supported the movement, he said.

Children who had lost parents and relatives during the war had sought refuge with the movement and been placed in orphanages, he said. Tiger officials insisted that children from the orphanages were not allowed to join the movement.

But critics of the guerrillas have long insisted that the orphanages were themselves fertile recruitment grounds for the organization. One 18-year-old in Batticaloa in the east told how after her two brothers were forcibly conscripted by the Tigers and then died fighting for them, the Tigers told her mother they were taking her sister to an orphanage to educate her. She, too, ended up dead on a battlefield.

Visits to two orphanages in the north, in the jungle area that is the Tigers' base, did little to clarify their real purpose. At the Sencholai orphanage for girls, the picture of Velupillai Prabhakaran, the Tigers' revered and feared leader, is in the classroom, and the girls call him "Uncle." "He's more or less the foster parent for these children," said Janani, the 43-year-old Tiger who runs the orphanage.

At the boys' orphanage, there was a shrine to the Tigers' suicide bombers.

One girl who had come at 14 - out of her "desire," she said nervously, as several cadres listened - was now, at age 17, a cadre, as were several other girls. Janani said perhaps "two or three" had joined the movement. She would not permit a visit to the older girls' quarters.

The 17-year-old cadre was also not an orphan - her parents were alive and living in the area. Tiger officials say that if they believe the movement can better raise a child from a poor family, they will take him or her, with the parents' permission.

Janani said that perhaps 10 percent of the girls were not truly orphans. Sometimes parents came wanting to take their children back, she said, but if the children did not want to go, "We can't force them."

It is not hard to find evidence of the Tigers' history with children, particularly as they move former military cadres into the civil administration they run in the north. There is the 18-year-old customs official who said he joined at 16, the assistant in the political wing who joined at 15 or 16, and another who joined at 12, and from the battles he cited, first fought at 14 or 15.

Then there is the cemetery outside Kilinochchi, the final resting place for 1,938 war heroes. The headstones have the cadres' real names, their "movement names," their parents' names, their villages of origin and the dates of their deaths.

On each, the only thing missing is the date of birth.

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Need for opposition and civil society role

Jan 9 – As the fourth round of talks was taking place, the National Peace Council of Sri Lanka, in statement said that the main opposition party should play a constructive role, and an opportunity of participation in the peace process should be provided for other parties and civil society organisations.

NPC's statement said, "The step by step approach taken by the government and LTTE at the recently concluded fourth round of peace talks in Thailand to resolve the dispute over the Sri Lankan military's high security zones is a welcome reconfirmation that they are committed to resolving problems in within the framework of the peace process. The decision taken to postpone discussion on the high security zones until an independent expert opinion is obtained was a pragmatic measure. This has enabled the parties at the peace talks to continue discussing other important matters without being stalled by this issue.

"In the Sri Lankan context, the balance of forces and the security of each side has been viewed as an important basis on which the peace process has been moving forwards. On the other hand, the resettlement of displaced persons is a humanitarian priority. The people must feel that they are obtaining the benefits of peace in order for them to support the peace process wholeheartedly. The issues of resettlement, demilitarisation and demobilisation are sensitive ones that exist in peace processes wherever civil wars have ended. In Sri Lanka, these issues have come up at an early stage. This reflects the dynamism of the peace process and not its weakness.

"The National Peace Council regrets to note that the opposition has been looking at the issue of high security zones and many other matters connected to the peace process in a pessimistic manner. This has been increasing the apprehensions of the people about the stability of the peace process. It would be more constructive if the opposition were to propose an alternative and practical approaches to resolve the conflicting interests at stake.

"We also note that the present peace process taking place between the government and LTTE is, by and large, an exclusive one with little opportunity for other parties and civil society to either participate in, or contribute towards, the decisions being taken by the two main parties. This is giving rise to resentment and suspicion. We welcome the decision at the peace talks to recognise the right of women to participate in the peace process by the formation of a women's committee charged with representing gender interests in the peace process. We also call for a more inclusive peace process in which those parties in the opposition can be constructive participants."

Experts join Lankan peace process

India's retired heavy-weight, Lieutenant General Satish Nambiar, joins the galaxy of international personalities involved in the Sri Lankan peace process this month when he will be called upon to prepare a report on how to resettle civilians in Jaffna without compromising the security of military installations on the peninsula.

Officials at the peace talks in Thailand said Nambiar has been asked to head an international team of experts who will be tasked with preparing the report.

Nambiar currently heads the United Services Institution of India, a tri-service think tank based in New Delhi. During a long and eventful career in the Indian Army, Gen Nambiar held several sensitive posts, including that of director general of military operations and deputy chief of army staff.

He is most famous for refusing to give in to NATO pressure as the first force commander and head of mission of UN forces in former Yugoslavia in March 1993. He finally resigned from that post.

Another internationally known figure to join the process in February is Ian Martin, the former head of Amnesty International. He will begin setting up a monitoring process for Human Rights in the North and East. This would be similar to the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission, which now probes, and reports on ceasefire violations.

The other well-known international figure is Yasushi Akashi, a former UN Under-Secretary General who handled the Cambodia settlement. Akashi is Japan's special envoy to the Sri Lankan Peace Process and is handling two tasks. The first is developing the government's "Regaining Sri Lanka" initiative and the second is to prepare a development and employment-generating programme for the North and East.

Akashi will be in Sri Lanka from January 14 and will be meeting top governmental officials and also flying to Kilinochchi for talks with the LTTE leadership.

LTTE is expands network

Jan 6 - While engaged in peace talks with the government of Sri Lanka, the Tamil Tigers have begun to expand their administrative network in areas controlled by them in northern and eastern Sri Lanka. Even in areas in these regions supposed to be under the control of government forces, where they have opened uo "political offices", they are expanding their network in recent months.

Particularly in the areas under its control, the LTTE is expanding its administrative departments dealing with finance, education, health, environment and transport in addition to maintaining its own judicial services and police stations.The departments of the administrative units are being headed by senior members of the LTTE, who have been involved in directing military operations against the security forces in the past.

"Our aim is to develop the area in keeping with our objectives and the directions of the leadership," said a senior member in charge of the Forest Conservation department of the LTTE. He said LTTE leader Velupillai Prabhakaran had drawn up plans to protect the environment, which includes replantation of areas affected by fighting between the two sides. "Our leader has directed us to plant more than 800,000 trees - most of them teak and other trees which have timber value," he said.

He said the LTTE does not impose taxes on timber coming into the guerrilla-controlled areas as they have been di-

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rected to prevent felling of timber and encourage timber being brought into their areas from the south of the country.

Among the administrative departments of the LTTE, the departments coming under the Financial division is one of the most powerful departments drawing a large revenue. The Customs department of the LTTE has established its offices in the southern and northern borders of the areas under their control.

Most of the taxes are imposed by its customs department at the entry point to the LTTE-controlled region at Omanthai in the north of the island. All consumer items are taxed 10 per cent of the value, while non-essential items, including alcohol, are taxed 25 per cent of the value. Pharmaceuticals are exempted from tax. "Our collection is well over a Rs. 2 million ($19,000) per day, but sometimes it could be higher," a LTTE cadre in charge of its customs department at Omanthai said.

If someone tries to evade tax by concealing the goods they are taking with them, or under-values them, the entire goods are confiscated. "Our laws at the entry points are very strict. If somebody undervalues his goods we have no scheme to impose a fine, but we confiscate the goods," he said. Recently a trader who had under-declared a stock of chocolates was forced to surrender his entire stock and return empty-handed.

The LTTE-operated bank also has expanded its services by encouraging fixed deposits, children's savings schemes and foreign exchange deposits.

The LTTE departments consist of paid employees as well as some of the cadres. An employee in these departments earns an average salary of Rs7,500 ($70) per month.

Senior members of the LTTE explained that though some of these departments had been set up in the mid-1990s, most of them have become active only in the past few months. "The Forest Conservation Department was established in 1993, but we could not carry out the functions until recently due to the war," a senior member of the department said.

JVP rally against peace talks

Jan 8 - In a massive show of strength against the peace talks between the Sri Lanka's United National Front government and the LTTE, the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), gathered more than 25 thousand party members and supporters for a march and rally at one of Colombo's busiest intersections on 8 Januaary. Speakers at the rally denounced the peace talks to settle the island's ethnic conflict as a western imperialist conspiracy to divide country.

Thousands of JVP cadres clad in red poured into the city from provincial towns and villages from morning. They were gathered at three points from where massive processions moved towards the Lipton Circus Eye Hospital Junction area in the heart of the capital, Colombo.

"Defeat the Elephant-Tiger conspiracy", the marchers shouted (Elephant is the symbol of Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's United National Party).

The event was called Jana Balaya (People's Power).

Addressing the large gathering amidst loud cheering, general secretary of the party Tilvin Silva called upon the people to get to the street till they see the end of this government, and protest against the so-called peace process which was in reality the talks for the division of the country.

Addressing the rally, the propaganda secretary of the JVP, Mr. Wimal Weerawanse, said the JVP was working towards an opposition alliance to launch mass agitational campaigns aimed at overthrowing Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe's government.

He slammed the Norwegians for interfering in the internal affairs of the island. JVP speakers lambasted Mr. Jon Westborg, the Norwegian Ambassador in Sri Lanka, accusing him of working in cahoots with the Liberation Tigers referring to the role the his embasy played in the import of radio equipment for the LTTE.

"January 8 is a very important day as we have started our campaign against the government. And we know we will be victorious as we have the faithful followers of our motherland who are gathered here today. All round us is a mass of heads," he said indicating the huge crowds of people at the Lipton circus.

With the support of the masses belonging to all races and religions, and the other forces, the JVP would be able to achieve their target of toppling the UNF government. The country will then be ruled by a faithful government and not a treacherous one like the UNF," JVP's Propaganda secretary of the JVP Wimal Weerawansa said.

"This so-called peace process is basically to give more power to the Tigers for them to roam more freely and import high tech equipment without taxation. The LTTE can do anything, while in contrast our local forces can't even lift a finger outside their camp as they are ordered not to do so. Despite claims by Prime Minister Wickremesinghe that the country is nearing to achieve peace, the reality is that the country is marching towards Eelam" Mr. Weerawansa claimed.

Mr. Weerawanse said the UNF government was frightened about the growing disillusionment among the people, caused by the sky rocketing cost of living and "its treacherous association with the LTTE". "The year 2003 is the crucial year to make or break our country, and it is up to us to decide whether we need a one Sri Lanka or a Sri Lanka divided into two", he said.

Overwhelming support for peace process - Survey

The overwhelming public support for the current peace process remains unchanged according to a survey carried out by the Centre for Policy Alternative.

There is a notable percentage (74.7 per cent) of Sri Lankans who are aware of the second round of peace talks. However, only 24.7 per cent say they know about the decision taken at the talks.

The survey revealed that over 60 per cent Sri Lankans are satisfied with the outcome of the second round of talks. It further reveals that an overwhelming majority (77.8 per cent) of Sri Lankans think the return and resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) should be top priority.

While half the Sri Lankans believe that the Government is committed to treating the return of the IDP as a priority in the peace process only 17.9 per cent believe the LTTE's commitment to the return of the IDP, the survey shows. Over

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46 per cent of Sri Lankans interviewed who were aware of the LTTE participation in the Oslo in November last year, disapproved of the LTTE's participation.

However, an overwhelming majority of the Tamils (98 per cent) and upcountry Tamils (74.6 per cent) communities approve of the LTTE's participation at the Oslo meeting. While a majority (45.3 per cent) of the Sri Lankans express that they are unaware of the PA's official statement that accused the Norwegian facilitators of being partial towards the LTTE and overwhelming majority of the Tamil (78 per cent) community disagree with this statement.

The survey also indicates that since June 2002, there is a steady increase of people's approval for Norway assisting in the Sri Lankan peace process. Though the majority of Sinhalese approve of Norway's assistance, when compared to other ethnic communities their approval is low.

Abducted EPRLF man found dead

24 Dec - The body of a senior member of the EPRLF (Varatharajah Perumal group), Poopalapillai Alaguthurai (35) abducted allegedly by the LTTE on December 16 was found on December 21 in the Mandoor lake with injuries supposedly sustained due to torture and mutilation. The body of Poopalapillai Alaguthurai, deputy chairman of Porathivu Pattu Pradeshiya Sabha was found minus an arm. It was recovered by The Wellawely police who recovered the body took it to the Batticaloa hospital for a postmortem. Acting district judge V. Vinoba on 23rd at Batticaloa general hospital held an inquest.

Alaguthurai, who got married one month ago had gone to his sister's home at his native village Mandoor third Kuruchchi and had supper on this fateful day at 7.30 p.m. Then he fetched some food and was on his way to his wife's residence situated in the same village. His failure to turn up at the EPRLF office made his colleagues to contact his home people next day and found him missing.

A statement issued by T.Subathiran, EPRLF Member of Jaffna Municipal Council said that LTTE had issued written warning to Alagathurai to resign from the council. According to two witnesses, on the day of the abduction, two LTTE members Mylvaganam Paramanathan and Ramaiah Ragakutty alias Rajan took him away ostensibly for a discussion.

"This murder and the spate of abduction and disappearances since the Sri Lankan government initiated peace talks, raises a serious question about the real objectives of the LTTE. Intimidation of members of other political parties, journalists, civil servants and academics continues unabated in the North and East. There have been at least four similar abductions and disappearances in the Eastern province within last four weeks. It is clear that contrary to their public pronouncements the LTTE continues to use murder, abduction, extortion, and physical violence to maintain their grip over the Tamil community. Political murder is the LTTE's modus operandi of becoming the sole representative of the Tamils," the statement said. Mr. Thurairatnam, national organizer of EPRLF and the chairman of Pooratheivu Pradeshya Sabha have already lodged a complaint with the SLMM and Wellawely police.

Reporting the incident, TamilNet said, "LTTE denied any involvement in the abduction and subsequent murder of Alaguthurai. LTTE further said that with the current climate of peace they will not engage in such activities and that nefarious elements intent on sabotaging peace efforts are involved in treacherous acts to apportion blame on LTTE."

Meanwhile, police are yet without any clues about another three EPDP members, who were abducted allegedly by the LTTE on December 3. The abducted are EPDP Batticaloa Organizer Viji Thangarajah and Nesiah Nesarajah, who was Former North East Provincial Council Member as well as translator Gnanajothi of Badulla. Nesiah Nesarajah who was earlier a prominent leader of EPRLF Varatharajah group later joined the EPDP.

Tigers expand radio broadcast

Jan 1 - Voice of Tigers (VoT) announced in its daily nightly broadcast that it will increase its broadcast time and distance from 16 January marking the tenth memorial anniversary of Colonel Kittu.

The increased coverage is possible after a five-kilowatt FM transmitter was imported in October through the embassy of Norway, which is acting as peace broker in Sri Lanka.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga wrote to Norwegian Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik to protest against the involvement of the Embassy in importation of the radio equipment.The JVP mounted a campaign for the expulsion of the Norwegian Ambassador Jon Westborg for his role in the affair.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremasinghe came to the rescue of the Ambassador by giving graphic details of the events surrounding the import of the equipment as part of the peace process. He said that it was on the request of his government that the Embassy played the role of the consignee.

"It is disheartening to witness orchestrated opposition by the chauvanistic elements in the South to the import of broadcast equipment by LTTE," S.P.Thamilchelvan, head of the Political Section of the LTTE, said addressing the VoT technicians in a ceremony held to open a new VoT building in Vanni.

"We have been working on importing new broadcast equipment for VoT for the past several years. Current peace climate has made this possible now. We regard the new equipment as very essential in this climate of peace. It is our cardinal duty to inform Tamil people on all issues affecting the current peace talks so that Tamil people can express their opinions on matters affecting them. Recent efforts by the People Alliance (PA) and other extremists to draw the Norwegian Government into this matter, condemning the involvement of the Norwegian Government and creating a controversy over this can only be viewed as an ill conceived at-

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tempt to sabotage the peace process," Thamilchelvan added.

EPDP meets US Ambassador

Jan 7 - An EPDP delegation comprising the Secretary General of the Party Mr. K. N. Douglas Devanada MP, Dr. K. Vigneswaran, Mr. S. Thavarajah and Ms. Maheswary Velauthan met the United States Ambassador Mr. Ashley Wills on 6 January, and EPDP Press release said.

The release also said the EPDP delegation explained to the Ambassador how the LTTE was carrying on its hostile acts against the EPDP and other democratic political parties. The hostile acts, which began in September 2002 in the form of threats, have now advanced to abductions and killings the in a systematicway.

The EPDP brought to the attention of the Ambassador the contents of the two leaflets issued recently by the LTTE.

The leaflets contained a call to members of the EPDP and other democratic parties to join the LTTE, with a veiled threat to those who did not do so. The second leaflet accused the EPDP and other democratic parties for engaging in the abduction and killing of their own members and putting the blame for such acts on the LTTE. The EPDP delegation also brought to the attention of the Ambassador that the LTTE was also responsible for the violation of human rights of several civilians. The party requested the ambassador to intervene in the matter of LTTE detention centres in the Mullaitivu District, where the LTTE according to their own admission held more than 400 detainees.

The EPDP delegation requested the Ambassador to use his good offices to pressurize the LTTE to respect democracy, pluralism and human rights.

LSSP concerned over course of peace process

7 Jan - The Lanka Sama Samaja Party has expressed grave concern over the indeterminate nature of the discussions engaged in by the government and the LTTE as part of the peace process, a press release issued by the LSSP leader Batty Weerakoon said.

It said: "It took the LTTE nearly a year to admit the reality that a possible solution to the ethnic conflict has to be on the basis of a united Sri Lanka. This lengthening out of the substantive exercise involved in the peace process has given rise to other issues which though they appear to be of a pressing nature could be resolved only within the parameters agreed on for the purposes of reaching an acceptable political solution, Among these issues are the High Security Zones in the North and the EP Muslim demand that they be free of LTTE control of their affairs.

"The government's failure to establish a meaningful relationship with the President has pushed it to non-transparent devices in accommodating the LTTE as has happened in helping it with the accommodating equipment. This non-transparency has helped others to transform what has been claimed to be an act of goodwill into something of a demonic character.

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"The LSSP does not dismiss off hand the government's claim that it alone is not to be blamed for the failure to establish the prerequisite understanding with the President for the needed bi-partisan approach to the peace process. But the LSSP does not see that the government has any justifiable reason for its failure to involve Parliament in the monitoring process. The LSSP together with the CPSL and others who also seek a peaceful solution to the conflict did suggest to the Prime Minister himself right at the commencement of the process that he moves to set up a Parliamentary Select Committee under the chairmanship of the Leader of the Opposition for this purpose. The government did accept the need for such monitoring but its failure to follow this up has effectively shut Parliament out of the on-going process.

"The LSSP stands for a positive PA response to the formula that has been stated by the LTTE as what should be worked out in the negotiations. This is a formula that was also the basis of the PA's October 1997 presentation to Parliament. In its Article 1 it stated, "Sri Lanka is one, Sovereign and Independent Republic, being an indissoluble union of Regions and shall be known as the Republic of Sri Lanka." The draft Constitution presented to Parliament by the PA in August 2000 and torn and set on fire by the UNP and the JVP made no departure from this basic position when its Article 1.(1) stated, "The Republic of Sri Lanka is one, free, sovereign and independent State consisting "of the institutions of the Centre and the Regions which shall exercise power as laid down in the Constitution." The UNP rejecting it in Parliament said that it did so despite agreement already established with the P A, because the Maha Sangha were not made aware of its provisions. The JVP declared as reason for its rejection that it tears the country into bits and pieces.

"The decision by the people at the last parliamentary election to keep the PA in the Opposition in the present Parliament should make no difference to its political solution hammered out by the President herself and embodied in the legislation it proposed. The parliamentary power struggle that motivates both government and opposition should not be allowed to push the PA to opportunistic alliances and unprincipled politics that turns its back on accepted political positions.

"The LSSP is part of the Sri Lanka Left that has shunned opportunist and unprincipled politics. Its present task within the PA as recognized by its recent party conference is the building of a progressive platform for the PA in respect of both the national question and the imperialist threat to us as a nation.

"The LSSP cannot accept any PA alliance with the JVP on the peace process unless the JVP unequivocally accepts the PA's position on the devolution of political power as embodied in the PA's Constitutional Bill that was presented to Parliament in August 2000. In the alternative the JVP has the obligation to present to the PA its alternative political solution to the ethnic conflict."

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Sharp increase in cost of living

The cost of living in Sri Lanka has risen further giving rise to widespread discontent among many sections of society.

Shell and Laugfs have increased the price of LP gas claiming that the price of LP gas in the world market has risen recently.

Shell and Laugfs have increased the price of a LP gas cylinder by Rs. 30 and Rs. 65 respectively.

The chairman of the Laugfs Gas Lanka, W.K.H. Wegapitiya said that the price of a gas cylinder might even go up further in the event of a war in the Middle East.

Although the Fair Trade Commission has ordered Shell to reduce the price of a gas cylinder by Rs. 45, a spokesman for Shell told The Sunday Times that they are not in a position to comply due to the high price of LP gas prevailing in the world market.

The prices of bread and bread-related items too have gone up between Rs. 1 and Rs. 1.50 after Prima Ceylon Limited announced a price increase in flour claiming that the price of flour has recorded an increase in the world market.

Mr. Parakrama Dassanayake, the President of the Bakery Owners' Association of Sri Lanka said that they were forced to increase the prices of bread and other flour-based products in consequence. "The other reason for the increase is the hike in prices of margarine, yeast, gas and diesel," he said. He added that margarine and yeast prices have gone up by 15 to 20 percent.

Wheat flour price has been increased by Rs. 2.50. This increase in price came into effect from midnight 8 January. The price of Prima Mill Brand flour has gone up from Rs. 19.50 to Rs. 22.00 and Prima Green flour has gone up from Rs. 16.20 to Rs. 17.20. Prima Ceylon which is the sole distributor of wheat flour in Sri Lanka stated in a press release that the reason for the price increase was the higher international prices of wheat, which have occurred due to severe droughts experienced simultaneously in America, Canada and Australia.

Cabinet minister and CWC leader, Arumugam Thondaman in a press release said that this increase would result in serious economic difficulties. He also said that the largest number of wheat flour consumers were the estate workers from the Nuwara Eliya region.

He also added that most of the estate workers earned a daily wage and they had adjusted to spending the wage according to their needs. This sudden price increase will completely disrupt their routine, he said. Thondaman further stated

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that not only the estate workers but the whole nation would be affected by the increase.

"Since the flour industry has been handed over to Prima this monopoly has caused havoc in the country. There's no price control and I believe that the prices should be immediately controlled to prevent anymore distress to society," Thondaman added.

The increase in the price of wheat is not only confined to the product itself. It affects the prices of any wheat flour-based product such as bread, stringhopper, hopper etc. The prices of these products are already high and should they increase then the country will be in an economic turmoil.

Meanwhile, according to the weekly price bulletin issued by the Hector Kobbekaduwa Agrarian Research and Training Institute, there has been a steep increase in the price of rice and vegetables when compared to last year.

Gathering Storm in the East

The MoU has been in operation for nearly a year now. While the government and the LTTE congratulate themselves on the peace process (supported by the silence of civil society), as is evident from the findings detailed in Bulletin 31, released on 13 January, of the University Teachers for Human Rights (Jaffna), there is little to celebrate. The MoU has instead of empowering political space narrowed it even further. Bulletin 31 concentrates on the LTTE's suppression of dissent among ordinary people and rival political groups, its child conscription programme in the East and the growing Tamil-Muslim tensions in the East.

Despite the statements made by the government representatives, the LTTE representatives and civil society activists in the South, the peace process still fails to address or recognize serious violations of human rights and even of the terms of the MoU by the LTTE. This report highlights the recent elimination of members of rival political groups by the LTTE such as P.Alahathurai a prominent member of the EPRLF (V) whose body was recently discovered in Batticaloa, tortured with his hand and ear severed. We ask why the LTTE are able to abduct, torture and murder members of opposition groups with the apparent complicity of the State police forces who are not investigating these crimes. The LTTE continue to refuse to accept any political or civil identity independent of them. Civil society by its refusal to speak out about human rights violations and the present situation in the North and East is made an accomplice in the LTTE's programme of terror. The UTHR(J) once again tries to highlight how a totalitarian political ethos is being consolidated with callous disregard for the human life and human rights.

This report documents how despite the statements of our politicians the MoU has served only to further narrow political space. Not only are the LTTE abducting members of rival political groups they are also intensifying their child conscription programme. As UTHR (J) reports have consistently documented, child conscription has been proceeding and has not depreciated appreciably with the peace process. In fact child conscription has intensified under the MoU and spread to areas under government control. Forcible child conscription is also part of our present peace process. UTHR (J) highlights a few recent cases of escapees from LTTE camps and also lists those who have been abducted whose lives are unaccounted for. Neither the SLMM, the government nor civil society groups are making the LTTE accountable for child conscription. Far from decreasing LTTE conscription in the East in the 10-13-age range seems to be on the rise. This may be because child soldiers are easier to school to unthinking obedience. It is suggested that older cadres who are in 'peace' are seeking to consolidate personal power and developing personal agendas of self improvement through expropriation of wealth and exploitation of fear are proving less easy to control and manipulate. Batticaloa is nightly violated by the vans with tinted glass which travel openly though government controlled areas. These vans are for abducting political opponents and children. Bulletin 31 also draws attention to the plight of the LTTE's underage returnees and to the children returned due to psychological trauma. These children have received little publicity in recent times though the frequency of trauma amongst the LTTE cadres is high especially with the level of forcible conscriptions. The LTTE's method of disciplining children is through the application of abuse, torture and beatings. Several children have been killed or returned severely disabled. These traumatized children are victims of a brutal war, a brutal totalitarian force and victims of a future without hope. What LTTE courts exist to give these children, or any child conscripted by the LTTE justice? With regard to the North the LTTE has recently been urging the resettlement of displaced peoples especially those who formerly lived in the High Security Zones. Without any guarantee from the LTTE to protect human rights or to guarantee

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a permanent and lasting peace, the people resettled in the HSZs would be completely at the mercy of the LTTE. Meanwhile the LTTE continues to appropriate property and extort money in the North-East.

Some of the most deeply troubling issues at the moment relate to the worsening of Tamil-Muslim relations in the East fanned and stoked by the LTTE. The LTTE has taken an active role in not only propagating anti-Muslim rhetoric but also instigating boycotts of Muslim goods and shops. These boycotts also allowed the LTTE to secure lucrative monopolies over the trade of commercial goods and produce. When this resulted in price rises in the 'Tamil' market and people choosing to buy instead from the Muslim market, a grenade was thrown into the Muslim market on 2nd of January. The LTTE has mobilized a number of organizations for anti-Muslim political action in the East and has been behind several violent incidents. This is creating and worsening tensions in the North and East and further radicalising young Muslim youth. UTHR (J) examines the case of auto driver A.T.M. Hussain (Kalanthar) found on the 5th of January his neck cut and his hands tied behind his head. Despite an official denial of involvement by Karuna, circumstantial factors indicate LTTE's complicity.

UTHR (J) points to the growing troubles in the East and the continuing suffering and resentment in the North and East. The LTTE's rise in child recruitment, rule of terror and abduction of political opponents has to be seen in the context of a complete lack of popular support in the North and the East which has led to its intensification of terror to maintain a seeming 'consensus'. When there is no independent press, no political space, no law enforcement or organization that is holding the LTTE accountable, and children continue to be brutalized and militarised in the North and East, then there cannot be a meaningful peace.

Film raises controversy

It is a film that has caused widespread controversy and speculation following its premier last month in Norway and screened in London's West End on December 19. The film, *"In The Name of Buddha"*, seeks to portray the conflict between the Sri Lanka's Tamil minority and the Sri Lankan Army and Indian Peacekeeping Force.

The film portrays a story from a Tamil viewpoint and presents the majority Sinhalese, who are overwhelmingly Buddhist, in a bad light for the treatment meted out to the Tamils by the military which had been engaged in a bitter and violent armed conflict with the Tamil Tigers. The film's accounts of human rights violations inflicted on ordinary families in North-eastern Sri Lanka contains disturbing scenes of the violence and prejudice that descended on the community from Sri Lanka's mainly Buddhist population. Its debut on November 17 at the12th Oslo International Film Festival coincidentally came just days before the Sri Lankan Aid Conference in Oslo on 24 November last year.

Religious and nationalist groups have protested that the film was an attack on the Buddha and the Buddhist religion. The fact that film had not in any way been critical of the Tamil Tigers has prompted them to allege that it was an LTTE inspired film. These groups have urged the government to take action to prevent the screening of the film in western countries. It is very likely that it will not get approval for it to be screened in Sri Lanka.

Claiming to speak for the Muslims, Colombo's Grand Mosque's General Secretary Nazushan Hassen said in a statement, "It is with regret we noted in the media, during the last few days, that a film titled 'In the name of Buddha' is to be screened in the United Kingdom portraying the Buddhists in Sri Lanka as villains in attacking innocent Hindus. At a time when every attempt is being made to resolve the ethnic conflict in our country which had ravaged for over two decades, a film of this nature will be an impediment to the peace process. We appeal to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs to lodge a strong protest with the Prime Minister of Britain against the screening of the proposed film. The Buddhists of Sri Lanka are peaceful and generous people. This is amply exhibited in their tolerance for other communities and religions, from the time of the Sinhalese kings.Hence, portraying such people as villains is nothing but a mischievous distortion of facts. The freedom of expression should not be touted to distort facts, create hatred and hurt the feelings of others. Views expressed in the film can only be termed sadism and not freedom of expression."

The Catholic Church has also protested against the screening of a film. The church in a press release signed by Fr. Cyril Gamini Fernando said: "Our attention has been drawn to some articles published over the past few weeks in the national newspapers in Sri Lanka, saying that a film named "In the Name of the Buddha" was shown to a selective audience, its central theme being the war that raged in the north and the east of the country. According to the articles, the film is an attempt to interpret this war as one between Buddhists and Tamils, the former harassing the latter. "We are aware that due to the war that raged in this country for over 20 years all creeds, communities and languages have suffered. We stress that attempting to see Buddhism or Buddhists as perpetrators of this war is not only a distortion of truth, but is a calculated attempt to create a religious strife that has never existed in this country. If the film has made such a mean attempt we denounce it."

"At a time when peace talks are being pursued to end this brutal war that has adversely affected all communities in this country and seek a lasting solution acceptable to all communities, we never approve of a production and screening of a provocative film of this nature, based on outright falsehood. We, if truth has been distorted, as revealed by the media, never hesitated to join hands with our Buddhist brethren who protest against the screening of this film. We appeal to the Sri Lankan Government to take every step possible in this regard," the release said. ❐

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NEWS TRACK

EPDP office attacked: 16 Dec - The latest attack on an EPDP office was at Atchuveli where a bomb had completely destroyed the building.

Jaffna DIG, Edward Witharana said the attack had taken place on Saturday night when there was nobody at the office. The damage has been estimated at Rs 500,000.

Mobile police that had been summoned had brought the situation under control.

An EPDP spokesman said several of their offices at Chavakachcheri, Nelliady, Jaffna, Kayts, Delft and Ninthavur had been attacked in the recent past, allegedly instigated by the LTTE.

US$ 1.62 million aid from Japan: 16 Dec - The Government of Japan decided to extend an Emergency Grant Aid of about US$ 1.62 million to UNHCR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) as emergency assistance for the internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka.

This assistance will be extended as part of the emergency assistance of about US$ 2.86 million which Japan pledged at the Oslo Donors' Meeting for Sri Lanka Peace Process Support on November 25, 2002.

Eelam 'banks' doing well:17 Dec - Fixed deposits in four Eelam 'banks'maintained by the LTTE have increased rapidly during this year, Vavuniya sources said. These 'banks' had been opened at Kilinochchi. Income of the 'banks' had also increased due to the repayment of instant loans and agricultural loans promptly, 'bank managers' said. There are more than twenty thousand account holders in these 'bank branches' with 82 employees.

World Bank aid to prevent AIDS: 18 Dec - The World Bank is to provide US$12.6 million to Sri Lanka to fight the spread of the HIV virus and reduce the stigma attached with the disease. Nearly 4,800 people in Sri Lanka are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, according to the United Nations Program on AIDS and the World Health Organization. The World Bank grant will finance a national HIV and AIDS prevention project. It will also support efforts to reduce the risk of an emerging epidemic of tuberculosis, to which HIV infected patients are particularly susceptible. The World Bank commended government efforts to control the deadly disease, but said the measures were "not sufficient to prevent the further spread of HIV infection among highly vulnerable" people.

Rs. 21 m Dutch aid for rights studies: 18 Dec -The Netherlands has granted a Rs. 21.5 million aid to set up a Human Rights study centre, an educational institute under the law Faculty of the University o Colombo. The contribution was aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of the centre for the study of Human Rights (CSHR), as well as supporting its human rights education programme.

"The support is of importance to further promote and raise awareness and knowledge of human rights, which is a fundamental component of the Netherlands Development Co-An Dutch embassy statement said, "In the ongoing process of peace-building and democratizsation, the promotion of human rights, by means of educating those involved in the process and raising awareness on different levels of society is crucial. CSHR's educational activities are targeting lawyers, community centres, armed forces, police, prison personnel, workers and children in the plantation sector and the media."

Lankan asylum rejects return: 19 Dec - The Netherlands government has repatriated 45 Sri Lankans who had either illegally entered the country or failed to obtain political asylum, according to the Dutch embassy in Colombo. It said the return of the asylum rejects and the illegal immigrants was carried out in line with a bilateral agreement. "More returns are expected in the future," the embassy said.

European Union to fund NE demining effort: 20 Dec - Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian affairs with the European Union (EU), Paul Neilson said in a report that the Internally Displace Persons from NE returning to resettle in their homes are facing severe hazards due to the buried land mines, and EU will do its maximum to provide financial support towards NorthEast demining effort. EU is planning to distribute about two million euros to land mine victims in the North East province, Nielson further said in his report. Nielson estimated that about 600,000 land mines may still be buried in the NorthEast and that on the average 10-15 civilians become victims to landmines in their own homes and surrounding areas or in the fields.

LTTE returns children: 20 Dec - The Vavuniya LTTE political leader for, Mr. Ezhilan, returned six children under the age of 18, two of them girls, who wanted to join the LTTE, to their parents, in the presence of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) officials and journalists in Vavuniya, Tamil Net reported. The SLMM's representative in Vavuniya, Mr. Jukka Polonen speaking at the event said that the SLMM has received several complaints regarding many children who join the LTTE without the knowledge of their parents and the LTTE's attention was drawn to the matter. He said that the SLMM has continuing discussions with the LTTE regarding identifying children who join without parents' knowledge. In his speech, Mr. Ezhilan said that though the children come voluntarily with eagerness to join the LTTE, the LTTE leader has sent instructions not to accept children.

ICRC scaling down operations: 20 Dec - The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is pursuing the cases of 10,000 missing persons in Sri Lanka for which they have records since 1992. The ICRC Delegate-General for Asia and the Pacific, Reto Meister, said that half of those missing were civilians while the other half comprised both Government soldiers and LTTE militants. Mr. Meister said the ICRC was scaling down its operations in Sri Lanka since the ceasefire in the war-torn island was holding. Progress had been made in the

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political negotiations in Sri Lanka and a conflict situation was now in a "period of transition". Internally-displaced persons had started returning to their homes and prisoners were being exchanged.

Germany pledges additional aid: 23 Dec - The German government pledged an additional three million Euros towards the immediate needs in the North and East and in support of the peace process in the country between the government and the LTTE.

A release issued by the German embassy in Colombo stated that their government had made available an additional grant of three million Euros which is an equivalent of Rs. 285 million, to the Sri Lankan government to meet the needs of those affected by the conflict in the North and East.

Agreement to rebuild A9 signed: 23 Dec - Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed an agreement at Kilinochchi to provide a Rs.600m loan to rebuild 103km segment of Jaffna-Kandy road (A9) beginning from Vilakuvaithakulam in Omanthai to Jaffna Town.

K.M.P Wijewardene, President of Sri Lanka Road Development Authority (RDA) signed on behalf of the Government of SriLanka (GOSL). Eight other officials from Private Contracting companies were other signatories to the agreement.

The A9 work is scheduled to begin in January 2003 and is expected to complete before the end of 2003. The completion of the road work will promote social and commercial link between the regions of the South including the capital Colombo with Jaffna peninsula in addition to making the journey for civilians travelling to and from Jaffna much easier.

Expatriate center opened in Batticaloa: Dec 24 - In acknowledging "the enormous contribution of Tamil expatriates from across the world to the progress of our struggle", LTTE has opened a "co-ordination center for Tamil expatriate visitors to get any help they need to make their visit an enjoyable and rewarding experience" in Kalladi in easstern Batticaloa.

Speaking on the occasions, Kausalyan, Head of Batticaloa-Ampara political section of the LTTE having hoisted the Tamil Eelam flag, said, "Like Israel's Golda Meir's speech on 2 January 1948 to the Council of Jewish Federations in Chicago that made thousands of Jews to give more that made possible the Jewish State, Tamil expatriates responded to our leader Pirapaharan's appeal in times of need that kept our struggle moving forward. These centres reflect our appreciation to our expatriate community. "Our expatriate brothers and sisters too have suffered as they relocated to unknown areas across the globe. Even while they face difficulties fighting nature, trying to make a living in an alien culture they did not forget their roots or the suffering of people back in the NorthEast.

When the expatriates visit our center we will provide all the information and help necessary to ensure that their needs during their short stay are met. Our committment to education, culture and technological advancement brings fear to others who try to suppress us. These are the result of the vision, intellect and deep love for the community by our leader. We fervently hope that our people can enjoy the fruits of this labour in freedom and with dignity." said Kausalyan.

Former TELO member shot: Dec 25 - M. Uthayakumar, 25, reported to be a former member of TELO, was shot today at 6:55 pm in Aaraiyampathy in the Batticaloa district, and was admitted to the Batticaloa hospital where he underwent emergency surgery and was in a critical condition, according to hospital sources. When Mr. Uthayakumar was standing by the roadside, gunshots were fired and a grenade attack was made at him from a vehicle on the road by an unidentified gang.

SLMM probes 11 abductions: Dec 25 - The LTTE has allegedly abducted 11 youths in the 20-30 age group from various parts of the Batticaloa district during the past seven days, a spokesman for the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said on 24 December. The SLMM office in Batticaloa received complaints of 11 abductions by the LTTE on Monday from both family members and the army brigade headquarters, SLMM spokesman Teitur Torkelsson told the press.

He said that according to the complainants, the victims had no ties with political parties.

In a bid to resolve this issue, the SLMM had tried to contact LTTE representatives in the Batticaloa district but had yet made no contacts, Mr. Torkelsson said. He noted that it was not clear what exactly was taking place in that area but they were investigating the complaints.

Lankan naval chief for Delhi: Dec 25 - Sri Lanka's Navy chief, Daya Sandagiri, left for India today to hold high-level talks in New Delhi during the next two days in a move to curb alleged smuggling of arms by the LTTE. The Vice-Admiral would meet the top brass of the Indian Navy during the talks to "strengthen cooperation between the two navies," defence sources said. The meeting comes close on the heels of the spotting of a mysterious vessel off the north-eastern Sri Lankan coast. Last week, the Indian Navy had spotted the vessel, said to be loaded with a consignment of arms and fuel, and had reportedly informed the Sri Lankan navy. Searches by the latter did not yield results and the vessel was last sighted moving towards South-East Asia.

During the 10 months of the bilateral ceasefire agreement in force, there had been reports of the LTTE increasing its military strength in terms of personnel and arsenal. The Sri Lankan military had also maintained a state of preparedness with the acquisition of military hardware. Given the LTTE's extensive shipping network and its near-total control over the waters off north-eastern Sri Lanka, the naval cooperation with India has become imperative, according to defence sources.

LTTE cadres remanded for abduction: Dec 26 - Five LTTE cadres who allegedly abducted a man from the Kalmunai Central Camp area have been arrested and remanded. Kalmunai Chief Inspector M.N.Nizam said the man identified as Ravindren was sleeping when the five LTE cadres stormed into his house and took him away forcibly in a van.Inspector Nizam said he had informed the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission of the developments.

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Balance of Forces vital for ceasefire: Dec 26 – Responding to the demand by the LTTE to dismantle military High Security Zones in the Jaffna peninsula and free up land for resettlement of displaced persons, the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) said, "In order to build peace the forces on both sides must be kept stable. In Jaffna, simply dismantling High Security Zones for resettlement and handing over land for cultivation will decrease both security and combat potential of the Government Forces. The balance of forces is the basis of the Ceasefire agreement and disturbing that balance is disturbing the Ceasefire."

"Representatives of the LTTE have stated that maintaining their military strength is vital if they are to be successful in their negotiations. What applies to the LTTE in this context should also apply for the Government. Normalisation and de-escalation are two concepts now guiding the way in the building of Peace in Sri Lanka. As SLMM defines De-escalation it is a reduction of the level of intensity of the conflict. Normalisation is the process of returning to a friendly relationship without violence. People want ormalisation and security, but one must not undermine the other," the statement issued by SLMM Chief Gen. Trond Furuhovde stated.

13 Navy men further remanded: Jan 2 - An officer and 12 seamen of the Sri Lanka Navy have been further remanded till January 8 for allegedly accepting Rs. 600,000 to release a boat of illegal Sri Lankan emigrants bound for Italy.

According to police about one hundred persons going to Italy through an agent had been apprehended in the sea off Galle and the Navy personnel had demanded one million rupees as a bribe. The agent had paid them Rs. 600,000 and the emigrants to be were released. On entering the Mediterranean sea they were apprehended by the Italian coast guard and deported. The suspects are being charged under the Immigration Act.

Goods worth Rs. 90 million spirited out of Customs: Jan 3 - Fifteen persons including three businessmen and four wharf clerks have been arrested by the Customs officers in connection with the alleged theft of domestic goods valued at over Rs. 90 million from the Colombo Port. The suspects had been allegedly transporting these stolen goods over several days from the Port when the final lorry load was detected, on a tip off, while making its way to the Chalmers Warehouse in Pettah. According to a Customs official, 60,000 yards of drapery, readymade garments and crockery were among the contraband. The alleged theft had been conducted by three Colombo businessmen helped by four wharf clerks and the consignment cleared from customs on forged documents. The eight other suspects arrested were the lorry drivers and cleaners who were transporting the contraband to the warehouse. The Customs authorities sealed the Chalmers Warehouse and the contraband was confiscated.

'Sri Lanka is at a crucial stage' says PM: Jan 5 - Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Mr.Ranil Wickremasinghe in an address to people said, "arguments over security matters should not be allowed to derail the momentum of the peace negotiation. The country has entered a stage that would decide the future of Sri Lanka."

He further said, "The government has made steady progress in its bid to achieve peace in the country. The government has achieved successful results last year that far exceeded its achievement militarily during the last two decades of war. The ceasefire agreement signed between the United National Front government and the LTTE has laid a firm foundation in this regard.

"LTTE has now agreed to abandon its armed struggle and pursue a federal state of governance as a solution the northeast conflict. Military de-escalation of the northeast and the resettlement of civilians are also part of the political solution. Both sides should overcome the shortcomings with regard to the implementation of the ceasefire agreement.

"No move should be made to abandon the peace talks and there is long way ahead in the path towards peace. President Ms Chandrika Kumaratunge has played a key role in promoting a political solution as the means to end the conflict.

"It is a positive signal the Peoples Alliance (PA) has extended its support to the UNF government in this regard. The Sri Lanka government is committed to safeguarding the religion and cultural identities of the Sinhala and Muslim communities.

"Although we have been forced to take several unpopular decisions, the economy is recovering and we have been able to achieve a three percent economy growth."

Fourth round of talks begin: Jan 6 - The fourth round of direct talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government began today at the Rose Garden hotel, 32km west of Bangkok, Thailand.

The LTTE delegation led by its chief negotiator Mr. Anton Balasingham's comprised Mr. S.P. Tamilselvan, head of the LTTE's political section, Colonel Karuna, Batticaloa-Ampara Special Commander and Mrs. Adele Balasingham, Secretary to the delegation.

The government's team led by cabinet minister Prof. G. L Peiris comprised Ministers Milinda Morogoda and Rauf Hakeem and Director of Sri Lanka's Peace Secretariat, Bernard Gunatillake.

Amongst the LTTE's resource people attending the talks were legal expert Mr. Visuwanathan Rudrakumaran, Dr. Jay Maheswaran, a development expert and Mr. Pulidevan, head of the LTTE's Peace Secretariat. The Norwegian facilitators were led by Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Vidar Helegesen, and included Eric Solheim.

The talks are expected to conclude on 9 January.

Japanese Foreign Minister's visit: Jan 6 - The Japanese Foreign Minister

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Ms Yoriko Kawguchi today flew to Jaffna by special aircraft and surveyed the progress of resettlement and humanitarian projects in the northern peninsula implemented with Japanese aid. This was the first visit of a Japanese Foreign Minister to the war torn Jaffna district. She also toured Chavakachcheri and Sarasalai areas in Thenmaradchchi areas, worst affected by the war in the district, sources said.

She told civilian representatives that the government of Japan would provide more aid to mine clearing projects in the north in the near future, sources said.

Later Japanese Foreign Minister attended the event held at Colombo Hilton Hotel where an agreement was signed between Japan and Sri Lanka. According to this agreement the government of Japan would provide a grant of estimated 1.2 million US dollars, which would cover transport support for mine clearance activities in the Wanni area, purchase of necessary equipment for the rehabilitation of public facilities in Jaffna, sources said.

Adding that Japanese government is very optimistic towards the peace process and promise more financial aid to Sri Lanka, Japanese Foreign Minister pointed out the need of co-existence with India in achieving lasting peace in the island

BOBLEP project in NE: Jan 6 - Four hundred ninety three more schools are to be brought under the Book Based Language Enrichment Project (BOBLEP) in the New Year 2003 by the ministry of education in the northeast province. The main objective of the BOBLEP is to help pupils improve their reading and language ability in Tamil, English and Sinhala. The project funded by the International Development Agency of the World Bank is now being implemented in seventy-five schools in the northeast province. This year the number of schools will be increased to five hundred and sixty eight in the northeast. In the other seven provinces more than two thousand eight hundred schools are to be brought under the BOBLEP scheme.

Drums of peace in Jaffna: Jan 7 - War-ravaged Jaffna will throb to the "drums" of peace in the form of a mega peace concert, when popular Indian artiste Pushpavanam Kuppusamy takes centres stage at a gala musical show at the Jaffna Hindu College Grounds on January 10.

The concert, has been organised to celebrate Sri Lanka's peace process. The Ministry of Commerce and Consumer Affairs together with, Dialog GSM, Shakthi TV/FM, has organised the concert, the first of its kind in the war torn zone in decades.

The concert will also coincide with the opening of a CWE outlet and mark the formal discussions to open a Salu Sala and State General Corporation outlets there. "People in Colombo had an opportunity to celebrate the peace initiative in December last year through a similar concert. This show in Jaffna will provide people in the peninsula a chance to celebrate in an upbeat mood," Minister of Commerce and Consumer Affairs Ravi Karunanayake said at a press conference in Colombo.

Journalis's home attacked: Jan 8 - The home of senior journalist, Mr. Senathirajah Jeyanandamoorthy, from Batticaloa in eastern Sri Lanka, was attacked with grenades around midnight on 7 January. The attackers poured petrol and set fire to the house located in the Sri Lanka army high security zone in Valaichenai, 32 kilometres north of Batticaloa. The fire did not spread due to rains and the efforts of neighbours, his colleagues said. The journalist and his family who were in the house escaped the attack.

Mr. Jeyanandamoorthy had received several death threats in the past allegedly from a suspected Islamic extremist group in the area. This group is also alleged to have set fire to a house next to the journalist's home on June 26, 2002, mistaking it for his residence.

Mr. Jeyanandamoorthy is the correspondent for TamilNet inBatticaloa. He is also a senior correspondent for the Tamil Daily Virakesari.

'Every child in school programme': Jan 8 – "Every child in school programme" sponsored by the UNICEF in the northeast province will be inaugurated in Trincomalee Thursday, 9 January, morning by the Minister of Human Resource Development, Education and Cultural Affairs Dr.Karunasena Kodituwakku.

Around seventy five thousand children will be enrolled into Grade One in all schools in the northeast and border villages adjoining the northeast under this scheme and the UNICE will donate school kits to every newly enrolled children, sources said.

Minister of School Education Mr.Suranimala Rajapakse will participate as guest of honour. The resident UNICEF representative in Colombo Mr. Ted Chaiban will also attend the event.

The North East Provincial Ministry of Education estimates around 56,615 students would be admitted this year into Grade 1 in the province alone and about nineteen thousand children will be enrolled in schools located in boarder areas of other provinces, sources said.

UNICEF sources said more children would be enrolled into Grade One this year compared to past as the twenty year old war has ceased with signing of the Cease-fire Agreement between the government and the LTTE.

Until the ceasefire agreement came into force, educational facilities to several thousand children had been denied as their parents stayed in welfare and refugee camps. Now the situation has changed and more people from refugee camps and welfare centres are slowly returning to their villages, sources said.

Greenlight for resettlement outside HSZ: Jan 8 - While the question of resettling refugees in High Security Zones in Jaffna has become an issue at the ongoing peace talks in Thailand, security forces and the LTTE during talks in Vavuniya have decided to rehabilitate more than 2000 families outside the HSZs in Vavuniya.

At a special meeting at the Vavuniya Government Agent's office, betwee Vavuniya Deputy Commander Parakrama Pannipitiya and LTTE's Vavuniya Political Wing Leader Elilan, the two sides also agreed to demine about 30 villages earmarked for resettlement.

At least 3,400 families have been resettled since the ceasefire agreement came into effect.

Help for Puttalam refugees: Jan 8 - Some 2,000 families in 69 welfare cen-

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tres in the Puttalam District have been offered financial assistance to rebuild their temporary dwellings under a programme initiated by Wanni Rehabilitation Minister Noordeen Mashoor.

Under the programme, which is part of a Rs. 4 million rehabilitation project, each family is given Rs. 2000 to reconstruct their temporary dwellings. Minister Mashoor and his ministry officials also visited the refugee centre at Karambai vilalge where several dwelling were destroyed in a recent fire. The families affected by the fire were given Rs. 5,000 each.

President wants suicide squads disbanded: Jan 9 - President Chandrika Kumaratunga wants the LTTE to disband its suicide squads as the government no longer maintains a Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) run special operations team which carried out raids behind the LTTE lines, particularly in the east.

Her spokesperson Harim Peiris said at a press briefing yesterday that the LTTE must reciprocate by disbanding suicide squads responsible for mounting human bomb attacks in the south particularly on civilian targets over the years.

Tigers abduct suspect from Prison Dept. Vehicle: Jan 9 - The government has brought to the notice of the Norwegian-led Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) about a serious violation of a cease-fire agreement in relation to the overland movement of vehicles on the Kandy-Jaffna A9 road. The SLMM was in touch with the LTTE regarding the incident, the sources said.

This follows the interception of a Prisons Department vehicle carrying a group of prisoners from Jaffna to Anuradhapura via Vavuniya, near Kilinochchi and the forcible removal of a prisoner. He was described as a former member of the LTTE. "We were to produce him in relation to High Court case," a government source said. According to the source, a group of armed persons had blocked the vehicle as it was passing Kilinochchi area and ordered the officials to hand over the prisoner. However, it was not clear whether the LTTE wanted to rescue the man or he was wanted by the LTTE in connection with some other incident.

Jaffna Prisons's Chief S. Sivasundaram said the particular suspect who had been removed by unidentified persons was charged for involvement with the LTTE and had been on bail, but had failed to turn up in courts when the case was taken up.

Police had arrested the suspect, Sivalingam Jayaseelan, at Mallakam and produced him before the Mallakam Magistrate who remanded him. He was being taken by the prisons officials to be produced before the Vavuniya High Court.

The suspect along with two others charged under PTA had left Muhamalai at 11 am and stayed overnight at the Mankulam LTTE police station where the three suspects had been interrogated by the LTTE.

The following day the Prison officials had taken the suspects and left around 7 a.m, but five kilometers away from Mankulam town four armed persons appeared, overpowered the prison officials and escaped with one suspect.

Under the ceasefire agreement reached in February last year, the LTTE agreed to permit unrestricted movement of vehicles to and from the Jaffna peninsula along the A9 route.

LTTE continues to recruit child soldiers: Jan 9 - The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission says the LTTE is continuing to recruit child soldiers. According to the SLMM, the mission has received over 600 complaints since March last year from Tamil parents claiming that their children have been abducted by the LTTE. The SLMM asserts that for whatever reason, the Tigers have seen fit to continue forcibly conscript children into their cadre despite their public claims to the contrary.

The SLMM adds that most of the abducted children hail from the East. The monitoring mission presumes it is possible the LTTE in these areas are distant from the Tiger hierarchy in the north and are thus continuing to abduct children despite assurances by the LTTE leadership that the organization has stopped recruiting children. The ages of the children abducted range from 12 to 17 years.

According to the SLMM, the issue is to be addressed at the peace talks in Thailand.

ICRC to trace missing persons: Jan 9 - Government and the LTTE agreed during recent peace talks in Thailand to ask the International Committee of the Red Cross to set up a new, independent tracing system, the humanitarian agency said. The ICRC has been carrying out its own tracing work in Sri Lanka - since 1990.

The agency said it welcomed the move because it was "increasingly concerned about the fate of persons unaccounted for in connection with armed conflict and internal violence throughout the world and the anguish this causes their families." The agency said it was "deeply committed to heightening awareness of this issue among governments, the military, national and international organizations ... and the general public." The ICRC said it has been approached by the families of over 20,000 civilians and combatants in the past 12 years. Few of the missing have been found, either dead or alive.

Two teenagers abducted in Batticaloa: Jan 10 - The Army has sought the assistance of the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission to probe an incident where a suspected group of LTTE cadres had abducted two teenage schoolboys in Batticaloa. Military sources said the two abductees identified as Janaka Raj and S. Gobhi, both aged sixteen were students of Ramakrishna Maha Vidyalaya and Vannamunna Maha Vidyalaya in Batticaloa.

More escape from LTTE: Jan 10 - A new trend has been observed since November with a high rate of escapees from the LTTE in the north and east coinciding with the decrease in complaints and violations, the Scandinavian monitors said on 9 January. SLMM Deputy chief Hagrup Haukland told the press that this new trend was observed with youngsters increasingly escaping from the LTTE. The LTTE has threatened the families, the SLMM said, following such incidents, as they wanted to get back their recruits. SLMM has approached the LTTE to put an end to strong arm tactics and at times adhered to and at other times fallen on deaf ears, the SLMM deputy chief said. Mr. Haukland said that the SLMM has no capacity to track them within the Ceasefire Agreement.Complaints

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recorded by the beginning of March last year up to December 31 against LTTE has amounted to 1403 out of which 502 are violations and 452 ruled as non-violations with the rest remaining as closed or pending cases. During this time the number of complaints against the government amounted to 385 out of them 54 are ruled as violations and 293 are non-violations while the rest are pending.

NUA slams SLMC split: Jan 10 - The National Unity Alliance (NUA), led by Mrs Ferial Ashraff has charged the two factions of the crisis-ridden Sri Lanka Muslim Congress of bringing disgrace upon the party's founder, late leader M. H. M. Ashraff.

NUA Spokesperson Abul Kalaam told the press that its party leader Ferial Ashraff who is also the wife of the late Mr. Ashraff was deeply saddened by the present split in the SLMC. Meanwhile, NUA sources said Mrs. Ashraff even gave over the SLMC party leadership to be solely carried out by Mr. Hakeem soon after the demise of Mr. Ashraff as she did not want a split within the SLMC. But despite her giving up of her leadership of the SLMC, such a crisis situation which has arisen between Mr. Athaullah and Mr. Hakeem was very tragic.

Kofi Annan's visit in February: Jan 10 - United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan is scheduled to visit Sri Lanka towards the end of the next month, a foreign ministry spokeman said. This is the first official visit in 35 years by a UN Secretary General to Sri Lanka. The last was by U. Thant in April 1967. Mr. Annan, during his two-day stay in Sri Lanka will visit Jaffna with Foreign Minister Tyronne Fernando. The visit will further strengthen the new ties that the UNF government has established with the United Nations. Sri Lanka was left out during Mr. Annan's visit to South Asia in 2001 due to the absence of an official invitation by the then government, the source said.

LTTE has breached ceasefire: SLMM: Jan 11 - The LTTE has breached the Ceasefire Agreement by threatening the security forces on 6 January morning, Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission said. SLMM deputy chief Hagrup Haukland said it was "ridiculous" of the LTTE to have behaved in such a manner as they have no authority to do so, especially since the forces were operating in a government controlled area. "Its totally off target and a misbehaviour on the part of the LTTE," he said.

A person introducing himself as an LTTE cadre had threatened the security forces personnel demanding that they refrain from collecting details on houses and other buildings at Vannarapannai, north of Jaffna town, on the day in question.

Military spokesman Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne said a group of soldiers had been collecting information on buildings, houses and their occupants when an LTTE cadre in civvies had shown his identity card and introduced himself as Pavalan and threatened the troops. Further he had told the troops, that they would be arrested, if they continued collecting data.

However, to avoid any clash with the LTTE, the troops had stopped their mission after the incident and reported to their base. Later this incident was reported to the Police at Vannarapannai and Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) in Jaffna, the military spokesman said. ❐

US closes in on South Asia's 'strategic jewel'

Rahul Bedi

NEW DELHI, January 6 - The United States is looking to India, its newfound strategic ally, to help it covertly expand its vital naval influence in South Asia. And the US also wants India's help in containing China's increasing sway in the Indian Ocean. To achieve these twin aims, the US's covetous eyes are on the eastern Sri Lankan port of Trincomalee as a staging point for its naval assets stationed in and around its Diego Garcia base in the Indian Ocean.

To gain access to the "strategic jewel" that is Trincomalee, one of the world's biggest natural deep harbours, Washington has "persuaded" India to step in as its proxy to extend its influence over the port without overtly arousing suspicion of superpower hegemony. To make this move possible, the US, as part of establishing its long-term presence in Asia, has successfully pressured the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) - who have been fighting for nearly two decades for an independent homeland - to persevere in their peace talks with the Sri Lankan government.

Located on the busy East-West shipping route stretching from the Suez Canal to the Malacca Straits, Trincomalee "controls" the Indian Ocean. Through a combination of diplomacy, bullying and astute bargaining, a paranoid India had for several decades managed to prevent outside powers - especially the US - from having access to Trincomalee. But "with the United States now India's most coveted ally, Delhi is unlikely to object to Washington neatly tying up various strategic bonds to fully dominate the Asian region", a senior Indian security officer said. Delhi is hoping to profit from its growing defense relations with the United States, he added.

During the Cold War years, the United States had wanted to station a Voice of America transmitter in the area as a precursor to its warships using the harbor, but India had steadfastly opposed any such move. One of the key clauses of the 1987 accord that led to the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force in Sri Lanka to disarm the LTTE declared that Trincomalee - particularly its oil tanks, located around 20 kilometers from the Indian coast - would not be controlled by any foreign power "inimical" to India.

But all that has now changed. After September 11, India-US defense relations are no longer confined to strategic cooperation through dialogue, periodic policy reviews and reciprocal visits by senior officials and service commanders, but extend to joint military maneuvers and the inflow of US military hardware.

Expanding bilateral strategic cooperation led to the reactivation of the Indo-US Defense Policy Group (DPG), the apex military coordination body to further negotiations between the Pentagon and India's ministry of defense

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that were stalled after sanctions following New Delhi's 1998 nuclear tests.

In a quiet, 35-year deal recently clinched with Sri Lanka - with US approval - the state-owned Indian Oil Corp (IOC) has hammered out a 200 million rupee (US$4.16 million) agreement to refurbish the voluminous oil tanks at Trincomalee. This refurbishing is happening for the first time since World War II, when British warships used them to refuel.

Currently, Ceylon Petroleum Corp operates only 15 of Trincomalee's 99 storage tanks, limiting sales to 25 tonnes per vessel and making the fuel expensive. But once the IOC activates the tanks and brings in petroleum products from its nearby Chennai refinery on the Indian mainland, supplies will be augmented to 12,250 kiloliters, making fuel not only cheaper but increased to 200 tonnes per ship.

To further cement its presence across the island, the IOC is also planning on taking over 100 retail petroleum outlets. The two sides are also considering an offshoot off the proposed pipeline between the southern Indian cities of Chennai and Madurai to the Sri Lankan capital, Colombo.

Providing the entire operation protection at Trincomalee will be US-trained Sri Lankan soldiers. Under Operation Balanced Style, US Sea Air Land Forces (Seals) specialists have begun training Sri Lankan army and navy personnel in security techniques to protect Trincomalee.

Sri Lankan police teams are being sent to the US for anti-terrorism courses with emphasis on bomb disposal. US military cooperation has also been extended to the island's air force that operates a wide range of Israeli-made combat aircraft.

The US Navy has long been looking for access to a strategically located South Asian port for its Fifth Fleet, established in 1996 for permanent deployment in the Indian Ocean to bolster the US Middle East force. US missile strikes during the war in Afghanistan were executed, among others, by Fifth Fleet warships, demonstrating America's ability to exercise military power against states deep inland.

But security sources said in a recent reassessment that Washington realized that to successfully maintain its sustained forward deployment posture in the Indian Ocean region and to counter growing Chinese ambitions in the area, it needed access to strategically located bases like Trincomalee.

The United States has acknowledged the Indian Navy as a "stabilizing force" in the Indian Ocean and wants a closer working relationship with it that includes arrangements to patrol the sea lanes from the North Arabian Sea to the Malacca straits off the Singapore coast.

Since October 2001, Indian Navy ships, along with the US Navy, have been patrolling the piracy-ridden Malacca Straits, through which pass over 80 percent of Japan's oil supplies from the Middle East. The Trincomalee connection will further tighten the US security network. ❐

(Inter Press Service Asia Times, 7 January, 2003)

Talking Points

● Cops Top Corruption League

18 Dec - The Sri Lankan police are considered by most people to be the most corrupt of all public sector institutions in the country, with politicians being identified as being behind most corruption, according to a report issued yesterday after a public opinion poll conducted by a well-known international body.

The local unit of Transparency International in a survey report announced at a news conference held at the BMICH said 39.2 percent of people interviewed damned the police as the most corrupt. Mr. Weliamuna of the unit said the survey carried out in 17 districts other than the North and East also revealed that the vital health and education sectors ranked next to the police in terms of corruption. Painting a sad picture of public administration in Sri Lanka, the survey revealed that most people could not identify any sector which they believed was least corrupt. In the 2002 Global Corruption Index, according to Transparency International, Sri Lanka ranks 56th scoring 3.7 out of a scale of ten in an indicator which reflects levels of corruption in the public sector as perceived by business people, country analysts and ordinary citizens. It ranks 46 notches higher over the worst corrupt country, Bangladesh.

Neighbouring India ranks 73, with Pakistan at 77. Finland is placed the least corrupt in the world with a 9.7 score with the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan in 10, 16 and 21 respectively.

Mr. Weliamuna said they had no plans to take any one to courts in fighting corruption, but in positive terms they were planning an Integrity Award system whereby clean officials could be recognised. Transparency International local chief J. C. Weliamuna said their aim was to form a coalition against corruption and push for reforms in the system.

● Copying terrorist tactics

20 Dec - In an exclusive interview with the BBC's Francis Harrison, Soosai, the Commander of the Sea Tigers, the marine armed wing of the LTTE, said that Al Qaeda, the terrorist group led by Osama bin Laden, had copied tactics from the Tamil Tigers. Soosai believed that the other groups should learn from the Tamil Tigers and the Al Qaeda.

The interview by Harrison with Soosai recorded during the LTTE celebrations of Heroes' Day in late November last year and broadcast over the BBC Television could now be seen in the BBC Website's South Asia section, under the heading, "Tamil Tigers Reveal Suicide Secrets" as a video clip. The news feature introduced the Black Tigers as "the Original Suicide Bombers of the World."

The Sea Tiger leader Soosai claimed that the destroyer USS Cole was attacked in Yemen using LTTE tactics says. He told BBC, "They are using our tactics. I think in Yemen they used our strategy of suicide attack to blow up an American ship. That is exactly what we used to do," referring to the attack in October 2000 on destroyer USS Cole in Yemen attributed to Al Qaeda in which 17 US troops were killed.

In the news program that featured masked suicide bombers in black uniforms Frances Harrison reported that, "The Tamil Tigers have sent more young men and women to their deaths than any other group in the world" (as suicide bombers).

"They are arguably, the most disciplined force and the most ruthless," she said. Some suicide bombers, known as Black Tigers who were shown for the first time to the public on the last "Heroes Day" of the LTTE interviewed in the program said they were ever ready to go back to fighting.

The BBC report, drawing attention to the covered faces of the suicide bombers, concluded, "It's not until they showed their faces the war will be truly over."

● Threat for Journalists

December 16 - A directive from Sri Lanka's police chief has drawn flak from a campaigning group in the island which has raised objections to a directive from him to police officers to keep files on

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journalists that included names, home addresses and telephone numbers.

The police department has acknowledged that its Inspector General recently issued the directive, but says the move is only a way of encouraging good relations with journalists and nothing more.

However, the Movement for Social Democracy said in a recent statement that maintaining such files pose "a major risk of being the beginning of maintaining a dossier on journalists with the police. It is in that sense a serious invasion of the privacy of the journalist as a citizen, and deserves to be condemned as such.

"It could easily extend to the political leanings of the journalist, organizations of democratic dissent he or she is associated with, and a whole range of other private information," it said. "Such information could be used by the police itself for acts of revenge or by politicians who do not like the work of a particular journalist. In that sense this circular has more than the touch of a fascist or police state," the statement said.

The group has urged the police chief to withdraw the circular, saying: "Despite its overt good intentions, (it) can in fact bring a major threat to the freedom of the journalist, the freedom of the media and the freedom of expression that is guaranteed by the constitution."

● **Obey my son or you are out:**

A recent report in the Colombo newspaper stated that a powerful Minister hailing from the Southern province of the island had summarily dismissed 11 security personnel given for his personal protection for not working according his orders. This Minister was a powerful Minister of the previous PA government, but defected from it joined the present governing party just before the parliamentary election in December 2001.

The reason that precipitated the transfer of these security personnel was their failure to comply with the request of the Minister's son to accompany him to a night club at a five-star hotel in Colombo. They had refused to accompany him saying that it was not part o their duty to do so. The son had complained to the father about the 'conduct' of the security personnel following which the Minister had issued them the marching orders.

A few days later, acting fast against the latest five star hotel brawls by rich political brats the police have summoned the sons of Ministers S. B. Dissanayake and Mahinda Wijesekera for questioning over the alleged attack on the son of a top official. The sons of the Ministers are alleged to have assaulted Pavithra Fernando, son of Airport and Aviation Services Chairman Hemasari Fernando. Mr. Fernando told the press that his son had suffered serious injuries and was warded in hospital.

The midnight brawl on 18 December took place at the Cascade nightclub of the Colombo Oberoi Hotel in Colombo.

● **Plot to kill President?**

Fact or fiction ? Or a figment of journalistic imagination that has gone too far?

The Interior Minister has appointed a special police team to probe into a news report carried in a Sinhala weekly on 15 December Lakmina, regarding a conspiracy to assassinate the President by UNF and LTTE plotting together with a present PA strongman. The unidentified 'strongman' although not identified has been speculated as the Opposition Leader Mahinda Rajapakse.

The Minister's directive to the team is to start investigations immediately on the matter and to arrest any person or group actually behind the plot. In announcing the investigation, he stressed that if the investigations revealed that it was a false news report serious legal action will be taken against the paper concerned.

Meanwhile, Mahina Rajapakse said that he had lodged a complaint at the CID to inquire into the news item about the conspiracy to assassinate the President, who is the leader of Peoples Alliance of which Rajapakse is leading figure. Describing the weekly as a 'scurrilous rag' Rajapakse believed that every MP in PA was willing to defend their leader rather than to assassinate her, adding that if the investigations revealed that the news item was false, then it was more an attempt to sow divisions within the PA

In the meantime, one Nuwan Nirodha, a freelance journalist, has told the CID that he had written news story about the plot to assassinate the President on the direction of Ranjith Silva alleged to be the new publisher of the weekly journal. After writing the story he handed it over to Ranjith Silva. he told the CID.

The investigators said they had obtained documentary evidence to prove that a woman named Tecla Dilrukshi Perera had been the publisher of the 'Lakmina' newspaper until December 20, 2002. She has now been directed to appear before the CID on an order by the Colombo Fort Magistrate.

● **Questions for the Prime Minister**

The JVP Parliamentary group leader, Wimal Weerawansa has tabled in Parliament a series of questions to be asked from Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe, regarding a meeting the Prime Minister's Secretary Bradman Weerakoon had with the Leader of the South Asian Relations Committee of the European Parliament on December 25.

Following are the questions listed for oral and written answers by the Premier:

1. Did Mr. Bradman Weerakoon, Secretary to the Prime Minister have a discussion with Ms. Maria Carrilho, the leader of the Committee for South Asian Relations of the European Parliament on 25 December, 2002 at 2.30 p.m.?
2. According to the report of this discussion, Mr. Bradman Weerakoon had agreed that according to the history of Sri Lanka there had been separate flags for different areas and on that basis giving Eelamists a separate national anthem and a national song would not be a problem to Sri Lanka. Does the Prime Minister accept and confirm this?
3. Does the Prime Minister know that the national flag of Sri Lanka was planned and officially recognized by a committee made up of acclaimed leaders representing all communities? Does the Prime Minister know that this committee consisted of Tamil leaders G. G. Ponnampbalam and S. Nadesan, Muslim leader T. B. Jayah and Sinhalese leaders J. R. Jayewardene and S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike? If the Prime Minister knew this, had he made the Secretary of the Prime Minister aware of this?
4. Did the Secretary of the Prime Minister give the above assurance to Ms. Maria Carrilho with the knowledge and agreement of the Prime Minister? Or had the Secretary of the Prime Minister acted on his own?
5. Does the Prime Minister believe that the National Flag of Sri Lanka doesn't adequately represent all the communities in Sri Lanka?
6. Does the Prime Minister know that out of the 190 flags hoisted at the UNO, Tamils have been accepted as a community only under the National Flag of Sri Lanka?
7. If the Prime Minister rejects his Secretary's statement what actions would the Prime Minister take; i. about the assurances his secretary had expressed. ii. preventing his secretary from giving assurances about the sacred national symbols to the international community? ❐

(Continued from page 39)

es, All welcome.

Feb 8 6.30 p.m. Veena by Subathra Raguraman wife of Bhavan's violin teacher Balu Raguraman.

Feb 22 6.30 p.m. Benefit Programme for Bhavan . Bharatanatyam – The Dance of Krishna by Sita Nandakumara

Feb 28 7.45 p.m. Music Fusion by Bhavan's students of Karnatic Vocal, Veena, Violin & Mridangam

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About People and Events

OBITUARIES

Mr. C. Viyakesparan

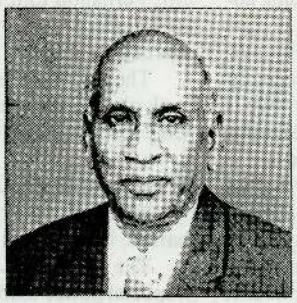
Born: 29.04.1932 Died: 13.12.2002-12-31

Canagasabai Viyakesparan, *beloved husband of Neelambal; adored father of Jivitkumar, Branavan and Senthuran; loving father-in-law of Roshanthi and Ramanthi; most loving Appappa (grandfather) and sorely missed by Manisha, Manojkumar, Ambika and Janaka; loving brother of Viyageswari (Colombo); brother-in-law of late Balambal, late Mahadevan (New Zealand), Sahadevan (Colombo), Rasadevan (Canada), Vamadevan and Nadarajah (both of Colombo) passed away peacefully on Friday, 13th December 2002.*

The funeral took place on Thursday, 19th December followed by cremation at the Ruislip Crematorium, London.

The family wish to extend their sincere thanks to all those who comforted them during their time of tremendous loss, sent floral tributes and assisted them in numerous other ways. – 787B Kenton Lane, Harrow, Middlesex HA3 6AH.

Mr. Poniah Nalliah



PONIAH NALLIAH, *Born in Alaveddy, Sri Lanka May 20, 1913. Died Toronto, Ontario, Canada December13, 2002.*

Retired Principal, Hindu College, Bambalapitya; Teacher, Royal Primary School and Rajah School Sandilipay. Lived in Lilly Avenue, Wellawatte prior to emigrating to Canada in 1983.

Dearly beloved husband of late Rasalakshmy, loving father of Chandran (USA) and Malar (Canada). Father in law of Shirani and Sarveswaran. Grand father of Haran, Radha, Priya, Logan and Niroshini. Brother of Muthuthamby (Malyasia) late Mrs.Murugesu, late Chellappah, late Nadarajah (Malaysia) late Sengamalam Murugesu and late Dr.Rajaratnam (Alaveddy). Brother in law of Mrs Rajaratnam (Alaveddy) Mrs. Vaheisvaran, Dr.Sivapalasundaram, Mrs.Maniarpillai , Mrs Sivasubramaniam (all of Australia) and late Sivapathasundaram, late Mrs. Selvarajah (Malyasia) and late Sivagnanasudaram (Australia).

Funeral rites were performed in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on Wednesday December 18, 2002.

Chandaran and Malar wish to thank relatives and friends who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes, messages of sympathy and assisted and supported them during the period of bereavement.

Chandran 513-755-9108
(bnalliah@fuse.net)
Malar 905-477-6301
(Malar.Sarveswaran@can.xerox.com)

Mr. R. Thanabalasooriar

Rajaratnam Thanabalasooriar, *Retired Head Guard, Ceylon Government Railway of Nallur, Jaffna; beloved husband of Menakai; loving father of Sumathy Sritharan and Sriram; much loved grandfather of Gajan, Kumaran, Luximi, Ratha, Gobi and Aarthi; father-in-law of Sivathillainathan, Rajini and Parasakthy; son of the late Mr. & Mrs. Rajaratnam of Nallur; son-in-law of the late Mr. & Mrs. Murugesapillai Sabaratnam of Vaddukottai ; beloved brother of Sivam de Costa (Sri Lanka) and Parameswary Sivapragasam; loving brother-in-law of Sarojini Sothinathan and Sakunthalai Sivaramalingam (India) passed away in London on Thursday, 2nd January 2003 and the funeral took place on Sunday, 5th January at South London Crematorium, Rowan Road, London SW16. The members of the family wish to thank all friends and relatives who attended the funeral, sent floral tributes, messages of sympathy and assisted them in numerous ways during the period of bereavement – 29 Fairlawn Court, Cherry Orchard Estate, Charton, London SE7 7DS. Tel: 020 8319 0322.*

TAMIL PERFORMING ARTS CELEBRATES SILVER JUBILEE

The Tamil Performing Arts Society (1978 – 2003) presents a Tamil Drama Festival of 3 Plays directed by K.Balendra at Waltham Forest Theatre, Lloyds Park, Winns Terrace, Walthamstow, London E17 on Saturday, 8th February 2003 at 6 p.m..
The festival is organised as one of the events planned this year by this active theatre group to mark their Silver Jubilee celebrations. For details please telephone **020 - 8422 2859**

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IN MEMORIAMS

The First year Remembrance

Mrs Pavalam Ramasamy
of Jaffna, Sri Lanka.
Born: 10.12.1925
Died: 29.11.2001

Dear Amma
Everyone says you went away, but to us you continue to live with us everyday. Sadly missed and forever remembered by your loving children Eng. Vijayaratnam (Head, Dept of Agricultural Engineering, Faculty of Agriculture, University of Jaffna), Vijayakumar (Jaffna), Vijayadevi, Vijayarani and Jegasothy (all of London); in-laws Selva (Research Officer in charge of Agricultural Research Station, Thirunelvely, Jaffna), Nathan, Sundaralingam, Thillainathan(all of London), Nagueswary (Jaffna); grandchildren Purushowththaman, Toothiransali, Luxana, Anand, Meni, Luxey and Vasanth.

11 Bulstrode Avenue, Hounslow, Middlesex TW3 3AA.
Tel: 020 8577 6377.

Third Year Remembrance

In ever loving memory of ***Gregory Joseph,*** *formerly of Cement Corporation (Kankesanthurai and Puttalam) and of Nigeria on the third anniversary of his passing away on January 18, 2000.*
Sadly missed and fondly remembered by his loving wife Erin; children Dr. Eugene, Enakshi and Hyacinthe; daughter-in-law Dr. Sharmini; son-in-law Paul Wood and daughter-in-law Noeline – 338, Meadowood Lane, Vadnais Heights, Minnesota 55127, USA. Tel: 651 482 7558.

Tenth Anniversary Remembrance

In loving memory of ***Mrs Ganeswary Tharmalingam*** *of Kondavil East, Jaffna on the tenth anniversary of her passing away on 21st January 1993.*
Sadly missed and fondly remembered by her loving husband Tharmalingam; children Brabalini, Bremjit and Ranjit; son-in-law Dr. W. N. Linganandhan; daughters-in-law Dr. Vani Bremjit and Shamini Ranjit; grandchildren Abhirami, Sathya, Praneeta, Prasheeda, Prashoban, Praveen and Anjana. – 5, Beaulieu Boulevard, Beaulieu Park, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 6EA. Tel: 01245 466363

Ariaraj – Dr. S. J. P.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities, and cries;
'It shall be done!'

Charles Wesley.

Lovingly remembered by his family.
Stourbridge – UK

Dr. S. J. P. ARIARAJ FFARCS

In loving memory of a wonderful husband.

The life that I have, is all that I have
And the life that I have is yours.
The love that I have, of the life that I have
Is yours and yours and yours.
A sleep I shall have, a rest I shall have
-Yet death would be just a pause –
For the peace of my years, in the long green grass
Will be yours and yours and yours

Stourbridge – UK.

Forthcoming Events

Feb 1 South London Tamil Welfare Group (SLTWG) Drop-In. Tel: 020 8540 3285
2 Feast of the presentation of the Lord, Jesus Christ
4 Sathurthi
5 Feast of St. Agatha
7 Shashti
8 Feast of St. Jerome Emiliani
9 Karthigai
11 Feast of Lady of Lourdes
12 Sukkla Eekathasi
14 Pirathosam
15 SLTWG Drop –In. Tel: 020 8540 3285
16 Full Moon
17 Masi Maham
19 Sankadakara Sathurthi
21 Feast of St. Peter Damian
23 Feast of St. Polycarp
26 Krishna Eekathasi
28 Pirathosam
At Bhavan Centre, 4A Castletown Road, London W14 9HQ. Tel: 020 7381 3086/4608 Website:www.bhavan.net.
Feb 6 p.m. India's Republic Celebrations- Chief Guest: H.E. Shri Ronan Sen, High Commissioner for India along with Smt. Kamala Sen
Cultural Programme of patriotic song & colourful classical danc-

(continued on page 37)

Jaffna College Alumni Annual Dinner Dance

The Annual Dinner Dance of the Jaffna College Alumni Association (UK) took place on 26th October 2002 and was well attended by the Alumni and friends of the college. This was preceded by the AGM at which the new committee was elected. The following were elected office bearers.

President: Mr. R. Anantha Nathan, **Secretary:** Mr.G.J. Gunasekaram, **Treasurer:** Mr.R.Chandrakumar, **Committee:** Mr. E. S. Selvadurai, Mr. A. Ganesan, Ms. Gopini Krishna, Mr. Sooriyakumar, Mr. & Mrs. S. Ganesharajah, Dr. Indra Srikantharajah, Mr. S. Sivakumar, Dr. R. S.Thambyrajah, Dr. S. Gnananandha, Dr. S. Maheswaran, Mr. F. Stephens and Mr. G. Worthington.

At the meeting the newly elected President, Mr. R. Anantha Nathan thanked the outgoing President, Mr. E. S. Selvadurai and the Committee for all their services and hard work in the past. The President expressed his wish to increase

(continued on page 33)

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First Year Remembrance

RASIAH KANDIAH (23.8.1913 – 21.01.2002)
("Anpaham" Kokuvil East, Kokuvil)

It is rare that a star should go out here on earth
Most think it only happens in the sky.
A great soul has been plucked from our midst without warning
There is a hole in our hearts we cannot fill if we try.
But great men like this cannot be extinguished,
Put out like a simple fire.
For they carry on burning today and forever
In our minds, in our hearts, in our lives.

Beloved husband of retired teacher Sornamma, a loving father and father-in-law, a great and wise grandfather, a noble friend to many, a man whom the world shall never forget.

30/2 Mayfair Road, Colombo 13, Sri Lanka

Third Death Anniversary of

Mrs Sivapackiam Muthukumarasamy
(28.04.1923 – 08.01.2000)

If every creature, rock and tree could talk,
Their lips would whisper your name.
Your life has meant so much to so many people,
Without you our world will never be the same.
Although you might not be with us in flesh today,
And we will never make you smile again,
Fear not for you are still in our hearts and lives
For in our memories forever you will remain.

A beloved wife to her husband, Mr Muthukumarasamy, a loving mother to her children, a caring mother-in-law to her sons-in-law and daughters-in-law and a wonderful grandmother to her many grandchildren.

2 Raybell Court, Linkfield Road,
Isleworth, Middlesex.

Shri R. Kandiah
An Appreciation

In 1997, Tamil enthusiasts gathered at the Ramakrishna Mission Hall in Colombo to honour Shri R. Kandiah by the draping of a 'Pon Aadai' to honour him to mark the publication of the book " The Essence of Hinduism" which was the culmination of several hours of dedicated and painstaking work. The Ministry of Hindu Cultural Affairs recognised the potential this book had to enhance the understanding of Hinduism, Tamil poets and leaders.

Shri Kandiah was inspired by the moving accounts by Bharathi on the plight of the Indians in Karumbu Thoddam in Fiji. At the age of seventy five, he visited Fiji, where the 'Then India Sanmarga Sagam' requested him to write a book in Tamil for the benefit of the Indian children there, who were proud of their Tamil heritage and yet were limited in the resources to learn this ancient language. Subsequently, he set out to prepare a book containing many absorbing stories, life sketches of Indian poets and leaders who had inspired him. His wife Sornamma assisted him in the details before going to press. The Ministry of Hindu Cultural Affairs arranged for the printing of 20,000 copies which were distributed free in Sri Lanka and Fiji.

Shri Kandiah's association with the Ramakrishna Mission started in the late thirties. Under the guidance of Shri Thambithurai, and along with Messers S. Chelliah and M. V. Rajaratnam and other residents of Kokuvil, he requested the Ramakrishna Mission to establish a school in Kokuvil. The school was inaugurated by Swami Vipulananda Adigal on 21st April 1938 and Shri Kandiah was appointed Headmaster. Thus began a period of transition of lifestyles with the increasing influence and inspiration of Ramakrishna and Gandhi and the wearing of kathar.

By 1944, Kandiah master, as he was then known was one of the few to follow a course conducted by Madam Montessori herself and obtain a Diploma. This newly added teaching resource together with dedicated service to the school, led to its expansion with additional classrooms. Pupils from deprived backgrounds were nurtured and encouraged to plan a better life through education. Lessons in Veena, Violin, Karnatic music, handicrafts and handloom spinning (a very Gandhian pastime) were introduced to extend and vary pupils' educational experience. Internationally, past pupils will remember the Friday morning assembly that began with Thevarem and Sivapuranam followed by parables from Ramakrishna and concluded with school notices. During Vijayathasami, there were steady streams of eager-eyed three year olds waiting to be initiated by Kandiah master.

Kandiah master was a proud man and realised the importance of the advice, 'graduate first' given to Gandhi when the latter was in the United Kingdom. Kandiah master the self-educated and avid reader obtained a BA in Sanskrit and Tamil in 1969. He actively promoted various village improvement schemes – Kokuvil Library and Nandavil Amman Kovil. In appreciation he was appointed a Justice of Peace. During the ten-year presidency of the All Ceylon Tamil Teachers Association, he worked with Messers Handy Perinpanayagam and Nesiah to resolve the disparity in pay between the English and vernacular teachers. He was also president of the Gandhi Seva Sangam and together with Shri Velauthapillai, built a strong base to cope with the social upheavals brewing in Sri Lanka

Kandiah master was transferred after completing 26 years at Kokuvil to Navatkuli Maha Vidyalayam as Principal. His days became longer and valued family life shorter, as he commuted daily and attended the many meetings, that he was part of. In 1970 he retired aged 57.

In 1987, because of social tensions, Kandiah master and his wife moved to Colombo and from there they travelled to Fiji, Singapore and Malaysia. They were in England in 2001.

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To his grandchildren, he was a valued source of information from Hinduism to Tamil Literature. One such discussion on the prominence of women in Indian society, led to his translation of Bharati's 'Puthumai Pen'from Tamil to English. He was meticulous in his approach to written work which became painfully obvious when the booklet for his grandson's miruthanga arangetram was revised at least on five occasions. He was truly moved when in the UK in 2001 he attended his grand daughter's Bharath natiya arangetram.

Kandiah master's final public act, was the donation of his collection of books to the Jaffna University Library in January 2002 bringing to an end a tradition of service following which he succumbed to illness on 21st January 2002

Om shanti Om shanty Om shanty

Nitkunan

Sri Lanka Railway Past Employees Celebrate Christmas

The Seventh Christmas celebrations of the Sri Lanka Railway Past Employees Association was held on Sunday, 15th December 2002 at Squadron Air Training Hall, Merton Road, Wimbledon amidst a large gathering of members, their families and friends who had braved the bitter wintry conditions to take part in the annual celebrations.

The proceedings commenced very late due to the late arrival of the invitees, with the switching of the Christmas Tree lights by Mr. T. Sri Pathmanathan, Secretary of the South London Tamil Welfare Group.

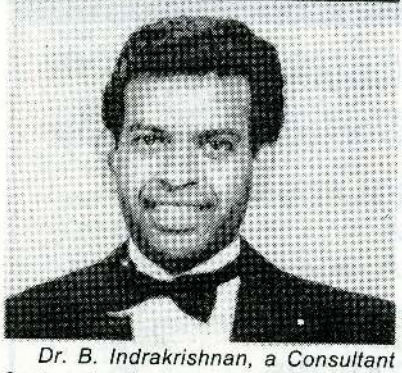
In the absence of the president, the Vice-President Mr. P. Gnananandan welcoming the invitees thanked them for honouring their invitation for the function, in spite of the poor weather conditions. He called upon the audience to observe two minutes silence, as a mark of respect to the members who had passed away, and specially on the tragic death of Mr. S. Navaratnarajah, retired Station Master who was knocked by a van in Scarborough, Canada.

The much awaited Fancy Dress Competition of children between ages 5 and 12 took place and the judges were Mrs Charmaine Segarajasinghe, Mrs. Thavam de Havilland and Miss Kamala Thirunavukkarasu. Kiarshini and Dinushan among the girls and boys respectively were unanimously adjudged the winners and the prizes were distributed by Mr. M. Selvanayagam (Secretary) and Mrs P. Arulampalam (Committee Member). This was followed by the Christmas Raffle and the winners of the 1st and 2nd prizes were Mas. Beno and Mr.S.Vaithianathan respectively and the prizes were distributed by Mr. P. Chellathurai (Treasurer)

After an adjournment for Xmas lunch, the audience reassembled, the Tombola game and the Musical Chairs competition were cancelled due to the lateness of the hour. X'mas Pappa arrived at this stage and wished everyone a Merry Christmas and distributed sweets and presents to the 26 children who were anxiously waiting for them. The X'mas Pappa too received a present from Mrs Rasakulasuruar on behalf of her husband, the Patron of the Association

The proceedings ended with the serving of cakes and the organiser of the function Mr.M. Balasundram wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New year.

Dual Appointments for Dr. Indrakrishnan



Dr. B. Indrakrishnan, a Consultant Gastroenterologist and Hepatologist from Atlanta, USA has been appointed for a three-year term in the MRCP(UK) Examinations Board. The examination format has considerably changed recently and Dr. Indrakrishnan is expected to introduce some American flavour into the MRCP examination. He participated in the MRCP Board examination in Glasgow in December 2002 and has been appointed International Advisor from USA for the college. Recently he attended the International Advisors' Board meeting in London and is expected to play a key role in orchestrating the exchange sponsorship programs for physicians from both countries to obtain advanced training in higher specialised fields in Medicine.

Dr Indrakrishnan is a Fellow of Royal College of Physicians of London, Royal College of Physicians of Canada, American College of Physicians and American College of Gastroenterology.

He is a 1985 graduate of the University of Colombo and an old boy of Royal College, Colombo.

Ammamma Feted

On 14th Dec 2002 a surprise function was organised by the students of Ammamma (Mrs Gnanatheepam Sivapathasundaram) to show their appreciation of her love, affection and dedication to them at the South London Tamil School. She is affectionately called Ammamma by everyone.

The program started with songs from the younger children from her classes and ended with a forest scene from the Ramayana. The original performance was produced and directed by her more than ten years ago. The acting was as good as it was then and those who took part were Saravana Namasivayam (Rama), Sumathy Shantalingam (Seetha), Sentheesan Yogarajah (Lakshmana) and Luxini Kiritheran (The deer)

There were speeches extolling her great ability from Messers Pon Balasundaram, Mali Mahalingham and Kanagasundaram, and also from her students Seran Anandarajah, Sambavi Raviraj, Shobana Sreetharan, Ahilan Khailasavasan and Rubini Perinpanathan.

The evening was a grand success and Ammamma was surprised and delighted. Her message to all of us was " Never forget your Mother Tongue and always respect your parents."

The proceedings ended with a sumptuous dinner.

Thamaya Wignesvaran

(Continued from page 31)

the membership of the association and appealed to all those who attended the college to contact him or any committee member in order that their names could be included in the mailing list

The organisation of a social outing, participation in the Annual Inter School Cricket Tournament and the Annual Dinner Dance to be held in the first week of November 2003 were some of the items decided on.

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